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OR, The Saints of Sunrise.

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"PINNACLE PETE," "DERRINGER DECK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MUSIC AT THE LIVING LIGHT.

THE Living Light was the principal saloon in Sunrise. That is to say, it had the most customers, the largest rooms, the best dressed bartenders, and, probably, the worst whisky. The liquor sold appeared to have a peculiar quality not found anywhere else in town, for it was only after an orgie there that the chiefs ever thought of painting the town red, and there was more bloodshed and hard fighting at the Living Light than at all the other saloons in town combined.

There were some who accounted for this, however, by suggesting that Nip Allison, the proprietor, had the run of custom among the

UP INTO THE AIR THE CHAMPION WENT. OVER THE HEAD OF THE STRANGER SPORT, STRIKING THE FLOOR ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK AND SHOULDERS.

chiefs, and that it was not so much the quality of the liquor as of the patrons who frequented his place. Certainly, the roughs and toughs could generally be found there in force, and though Nip could take care of his own interests well enough, he allowed the boys the largest room to swing in, and seldom called a halt when they were on the war-path, so long as they respected his furniture.

This being the character of the house, the reader will have no trouble in understanding that it was a sweet sort of a place for a stranger to visit unless he walked circumspectly.

So thought a young man who had only reached the town a few hours before, and who, after his supper had fairly settled, started out on an exploring tour without consultation or inquiry as to the lairs and lurkers to be found in the wicked town of Sunrise.

As he opened the door and looked around the room he could see, in spite of the dense cloud of tobacco smoke, that it was filled almost to an uncomfortable degree, and that he immediately attracted attention, though no one turned directly toward him, or offered to address him.

It was not so much the occupations of the crowd that caused him to form his opinion, as they were in little different from what he expected to see. Nor was there any loud talking, or boisterous deportment. Just then the Living Light was on its good behavior.

But the faces were of the kind which belong to the wicked, and the glances he intercepted were of the cold-blooded, merciless kind belonging to beasts of prey, and said that here might soon be a chance to kill and devour.

It was too late to retreat, even if the young man had desired, so he went forward without hesitancy, and without haste, until unexpectedly his eyes fell upon an empty chair. He dropped into the seat with something like a sigh of relief, and waited for some one in authority to come his way. He had already noticed that there were roving waiters, who took orders, and looked after the profit of the proprietor. When one of them appeared at the table, and looked at him inquiringly, he ordered a glass of toddy and a couple of cigars. The order being filled he settled down to what looked to be solid enjoyment, without caring how the proceeding might seem to the rest.

The day when it was absolutely impossible for a man to drink alone in Sunrise had gone by, and Nip Allison was responsible for the fact.

He had studied the matter over, and coming to the conclusion it would be for his interest to allow a stranger some option in the matter, had made his arrangements accordingly, laying down the law very decidedly. As a consequence, the stranger who called for a single drink did not commit an unpardonable sin, nor was he immediately called to account for that especial crime.

Of course the young man could not well help hearing something of the conversation going on around him. Everybody talked without reference to who might be listening, and as he leaned back lazily, with a cigar between his teeth, he heard a good deal of the gossip of the town. For fully ten minutes he was unnoticed and alone. He began to think the Living Light was not as bad as it looked.

Then there was a ripple, so small it did not give any indication of the coming storm. Through the doorway there passed a little, old man, who looked around him in a bewildered sort of way, though all the time edging toward the center of the room.

He was a queer sort of figure to be seen there, and looked as though he might be aware of the fact. Around him there was an indistinct halo of better days, and his face contained a suggestion of intellect run to waste. His hair was thin, gray, and straggling, and his long, thin face had lately been clean shaven, so that the hollowness of his cheeks, and the faint flush thereon, were the more plainly visible. His gray eyes were deeply set under shaggy eyebrows, and his thin lips were half parted in a smile of indecision. His clothing was neat, though so well worn as to be almost threadbare, and the shoes on his small feet were in the last stages of early dissolution.

"That man is hungry," thought the younger stranger, after the first careless glance had deepened into one of curiosity.

"He is going to try the Living Light for a stake, and if all goes well ought to make it; but he has not strength to stand the rough play that sometimes accompanies the charity of such places. Wonder what his game is, anyhow? Looks like a crank of the talkative style, and if he gets to orating' in this crowd Heaven help him! They will break his heart."

The old man drew nearer, and at this moment spoke a few words to one of the waiters who happened to be hurrying by.

The fellow gave him a sharp look, and then pointed toward Nip Allison, who was standing at one end of the bar. What he said could not have been heard, for the old man put his hand up toward his ear, and bent forward in an attitude of listening.

The waiter did not repeat, however, but hurried away, leaving the old man to stand looking around him with a smile of uncertainty on his

lip. He made a motion toward his breast, his hand, indeed, almost touching the pocket there. Then he turned away toward the bar, and winding his way wearily through the crowd until he reached it, lifted his hat to the proprietor with the air of the prime minister addressing the king.

There was a certain amount of careless goodness about Nip Allison, that had gone far toward making him one of the most popular among the sporting men of Sunrise. He listened to what the old man had to say with a smile on his face, and then, nodding, gave a sweeping gesture with his hand, which plainly said, go ahead.

The permission for which the old man had been seeking, once given, he did not appear as anxious as he might have been to take advantage of it. In fact, there was a painful hesitancy about him that would have made a kind-hearted observer want to give him a word of encouragement.

Unfortunately, at the Living Light, kind-hearted men were a rarity, and there was no one paying any attention to him. The regular *habitués* of the house were attending to their own affairs; and the young man who had been watching him with interest for a time, at this moment had his attention drawn in another direction. Without turning his head, or giving any sign that he was cognizant of what was going on at the door, he was watching with an interest a little strange, even to himself, two persons who stood there, conversing in low tone; and of these two persons one was a woman. When he had his first glimpse, the woman was pointing directly at him, and by the glances that from time to time they gave, he was reasonably sure he was the subject of their conversation.

They stood there but a moment or so, and when they withdrew, and his gaze wandered back to the gray-haired gentleman, the latter had conquered his hesitancy. From his breast-pocket he drew out a large harmonica and placed it to his mouth. And after that there was a season of music.

Much music can be got from a mouth-organ skillfully handled, and this man was a past master in the art of producing sweet sounds. At the first there was a laugh from those nearest who saw what was coming. Such instruments belong rather to boys, and there was something ridiculous about seeing one of them in the hands of so old a man as this.

After a few minutes, the men around, rough though they might be, forgot all about the player, and thought only of the sounds.

Clear and distinct was the music, yet neither loud nor long continued at a time. Between each tune there was a brief rest, in which the man stood with downcast eyes and heaving breast. Though the execution was perfect, it was plain, to a close observer, there was a struggle to maintain it, and that the artist was hardly equal to the rendition of a lengthy score. And, finally, when there was a bit of genuine applause, to tally unlike the ironical clapping of hands which at first greeted him, the old man leaned against the bar and buried his face in his arms.

It might be that he was overcome with diffidence, or even abasement, but there was one there who was certain he paused because he could go no further.

Nip Allison himself was more than pleased. He could distinguish a good thing when he heard it as well as the next man, and had been from time to time nodding approvingly. Now, he looked up at the crowd, to see if it was ripe for the movement, and then went ahead with his suggestion.

"That's a leetle too good to listen to for nothin'. If there's a man who has a hat without a leak in it, let him pass it around. If you fellows commence to chuck up your offerings, it will make a scramble, and not more than half of 'em'll go to the right place. Besides, he's not the sort to be sprawled across the floor lookin' after pennies. He's a gentleman by the looks of him, if he is down on his uppers. Paddy, suppose you hand around the tile, and don't forget that I am watching you. Do your drinking, the rest of you, while the collection is being taken up; and when the gentleman is rested, no doubt he will give us some more."

"Hyer we be," said the man addressed as Paddy, and whose last name was Porter.

"Thar's no leak about this old bit ov headgear, and she holds a solid peck. Get yer silver ready, if ye'r goin' ter fill it, an' thar's no 'bjection to a reasonable mount ov gold. Drop 'em in gently, pards, and I don't want to see a man-jack ov yer holdin' back. It's not ther biggest kind ov a organ, but what's ov it are all thar, an' I've paid a five at ther opery an' not heard anythin' that war a patchin' to ther noise ther old man has bin makin'. Good fur you, Turner, You start her with a cart-wheel, an' I hope no one will be thinkin' ov puttin' in less. That's right, Tom. You see him, and I don't ask for anything better. Every man accordin' to his size."

With a running fire of commentary, which kept the men well up to the mark, Paddy passed around the hat, until finally he halted in front of the young stranger.

The hat was duly extended, and had even a dime been dropped into it, to chink against the liberal offering already lying there, Paddy would no doubt have passed along without protest. Instead, the young man shook his head.

"I'll see you later, pard. For the present, just consider that I hold the age."

"Guess not, party. Chip now—and raise it after awhile, if you want to. This ain't no free circus, an' ther boy ez crawls under ther canvas, are liable ter be bounced, an' hev a sore head besides. We don't seem ter know you, an' what leetle we've seen ov you don't seem ter be white."

There was an aggressiveness about the tones of Paddy Porter that might have provoked a saint, whose bumps of combativeness were anywhere near average size. If they were meant to irritate, they certainly succeeded admirably. The young man raised himself up a little straighter in his chair, and answered with a deliberation that should have been a warning in itself.

"My name is not a matter of particular consequence, but I have no reasons for not making it known. It is Jaimeson—Jean Jaimeson—and I am very much at your service whenever you want to try your hand at the bouncing you have spoken of. Before you begin, however, you had better hand that hat over to some one who can take better care of the dollars. Otherwise, when you drop they will roll. Sabe?"

Porter was burly and pugnacious. If there was anything he delighted in more than in putting up his fists, it was being a principal in a shooting-match, with some one who was not exactly first-class. He could take care of himself with the best of them, but he preferred to have a trifle the advantage on his side. In the pursuit of amusement he had received numerous wounds and bruises, but his nature would always remain unchanged. The challenge was all that was required to fill the measure of his happiness. Without a word he turned the hat over to a man at his elbow, and began to roll up his sleeves. When they were fitted around his forearm to his liking, he took a step toward the young man, his hands held ready for gripe, guard or blow, as the reception given to his advance might indicate.

As Porter stepped Jaimeson rose.

"I understand the position exactly," the latter whispered, speaking in a tone that was not likely to reach any ear save that of his antagonist.

"A lady looked in at the door, and passed along the word till it reached you. I will have to fight for my life, anyhow, and I may as well begin now. What sort of an example of the chief saint do you think I had better make? Shall I knock you down to stay, or pin you up to dry? I swear, when you get through with me you won't be caring much about the rest of the circus."

"Put your hands up!" said Paddy, sternly. "I don't want to hit yer without givin' yer some chance."

"Up they are!" exclaimed the young man who claimed the name of Jaimeson.

And though he spoke quickly he managed to hit a little before he spoke.

It was a flush hit, that landed on the point of the jaw, and made Porter feel as though he had always been knocked down. Unfortunately, as he fell he caromed against the man into whose hands he had intrusted the hat, and that individual went along with him, while the air was musical with the jingle of coin that flew this way and that.

Such a disaster was the last thing Jaimeson contemplated, but it was too late to think of it now, since the mischief was done. The only thing in order was to defend himself against the rush which followed. Right or wrong the Saints of Sunrise who gathered at the Living Light hung together. Before another minute had passed he was fighting for his limbs at least, and probably for his life. It would have gone hard with him had it not been for Porter himself, who came back at him with the evilest of intentions, and yet made a diversion in his favor.

"Clear the track and let me at him!"

Up from the floor sprung Porter, a pistol in his hand, and as he regained his feet he fired, seemingly at random in the crowd.

A lane opened as if by magic, and the sides of the lane were fenced by men who carried revolvers in their hands. At the report the weapons appeared as though by magic, and if they were not used on the stranger it was because Porter was shouting:

"Hold yer hands, boys, an' let me at him!"

Then, as he was brushing the moisture out of his eyes with the one hand, while he tried to take aim with the other, Jaimeson's right hand flew up to a level, and there was another report, as he fired without seeming to take aim. Paddy dropped to the shot, and amidst a chorus of half a dozen other shots, Jaimeson gained the nearest window, and sprung out into the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WAS HEARD IN THE SHED.

THE disappearance was made so quickly that the result for the moment was absolutely stun-

ning. The men looked around blankly as well as they could through the smoke of the revolvers which had been emptied at Jaimeson as he went. When it was seen that Paddy was lying on the floor, with his limbs quiet, and a smutch of blood on his forehead, there was a wild cry for vengeance, which reached the fugitive in the distance, but did not accelerate his speed a particle. Once out of the window and he pursued his way rapidly, but with coolness. He ran down the sloping road, doubled back in the rear of the shanties, and finally darted into a shed, not so much more than a stone's throw from the Living Light, where he stood, breathing a little hard, but fancying himself alone.

" Swing low, pard. If they strike yer trail it's good-by, John! Ther saints are assembled, an' they mean biz ov ther strongest kind."

The warning was addressed in a low tone, and it made Jean Jaimeson start. All along, his hand had rested on his revolver, but his thoughts had been on the roaring crowd in the street, which hurried this way and that, shouting about the fugitive, and a rope. Now, at the sound of a voice almost at his side, his thumb went back, and there was a harsh click as the hammer of his weapon went back with it.

" That's right, leetle one. Git a good an' ready; but, don't be makin' a mistake 'bout yer Onkle Ezry. He hez it in fur ther leetle lam's at ther Livin' Light jest big ernuf ter b'ust 'em wide open. But, then, he don't altergether keer ter take 'em after this hyer fashion. One at er time, er even three ter six, wouldn't be so bad; but when it comes ter facin' ther hull menadegery—that's s'uthin' else. It'd make ther slaughter jest too nasty furary thin'. Pears ez though they war a-comin' this way. Ef they drop to us you better not fool with that iron with a hole in it ary sooner than you kin help. Better show 'em a clean pair of heels, an' git out over yander divide, ef you don't want ter climb another one whar ther travellin' are a heap sight wuss. An' don't bother yerself about Ezry. He kin take keer ov hisself, every time."

" And who are *you*?" asked Jaimeson, strong suspicion in his tone. " I had an idea, a bit ago, that I had not a friend within a hundred miles of Sunshine; and I can't say that I have entirely changed my opinion. If you are one of that gang out there be mighty careful how you move. They don't get me alive, and if I am elected for the trip over that range you speak about I would just as soon take Uncle Ezry along as not if I thought he was trying to play me foul. Please remember that I have a bead on you by ear, and that I can shoot in the dark as well as any man who ever picked trigger. Keep your distance till I know more about you."

" That's good talk, right frum ther rattlos, an' I like ter hear it. Shows yer ain't skeered ez much ez ye mou't be. Ef yer war yer would be a-spatterin' around with that shooter afore yer knowed whether ther man in ther dark war a frien', er on'y one ov them saints ez'll never git higher than ther end ov a rope. But, d ap that jest now. They're a-comin' nearer; an' I spect ef yer knows what's what you'll let Ezry run ther show tell ther tentin' season's over. Dрап it, man! Thar's ther king-pin ov ther outfit now."

The place where the two were crouching could hardly be called one of concealment, since it was simply a shed, boarded up on three sides, but entirely open on the fourth. Its principal value lay in the darkness which shrouded its interior, rendering it on that account easier of defense. The open side was toward the Living Light, and objects approaching from that direction could be quite plainly seen.

It was fortunate that while this conversation was going on the crowd had not been making much progress. For some reason they seemed at fault, and from time to time one or two dropped out, and hurried back. Had it not been for the fact that two men who were looked upon as leaders had kept on, the rest would probably have acted in the same way. One of the men at the head of the ruck finally halted, as he did so calling out:

" No use to go this way, Tom. He turned when he struck the street, and lit out down the gulch. If Neddy didn't see him, it was because he had his eyes as tight shut as usual, and he wouldn't have seen an elephant. If he kept up the gait he struck when he started, he's a mile down the kenyon, and like as not, dropping into the flume."

" Like as not! Like as not!" answered the man addressed as Tom, half-turning. Then, with a wave of his hand he added:

" Best go back and see how the rest of the boys are making out. Jim and I will look over the ground this ways; and I guess it don't need a dozen of you to help take him in if we happen to strike his trail. Go on back, and don't bother, unless you hear me whistle. Then come, too quick."

The order, for such it was, seemed to be thoroughly acceptable to the crowd, since it was obeyed unanimously, and in short order. The two men were left to come on alone, which they did, all the time conversing in a low tone. When the shed was reached they halted and looked around; though it was not such a glance

as they would have been apt to give if they had thought there was a chance of seeing the fugitive.

" No one in sight, and not much chance of any one coming this way. What's the matter with camping out for a while in the old shed, and putting notes together? It's about time. If you had let me know you wanted the stranger to tumble he would have gone under at the drop of the hat."

" Like enough; but the trouble was that I didn't know till the last minute that he was the man. Who would have thought he would come butt-end foremost, after that shape? The man who says he is a tenderfoot without nerves, is as wide off as he can get."

" But be lit out, all the same. Old Martin could have set himself on those coat tails, and never brought them down an inch. He went out of the window like a streak of light."

" Small blame to him for that. If he had been a blame fool he would have stayed a little longer—and been mincemeat, all but the spicing. And while he did stay he gave a mighty good account of himself. Oh, he's a tenderfoot—yes! And the kind I don't yearn to have in mine, unless there is corresponding big pay behind it. And there is where the trouble comes in. We had the dead medicine on him in there; and it may not be just so easy to get him in that shape again. If we had gone through him for keeps it might have been a little rough to his high-toned Eastern relations; but the man who knows anything about Sunrise would have said it was according to rule, and served him right. If he didn't want to accept the consequences he had no business to go there and ruffle around after such a fashion. Why, the boys really couldn't help but put him in a hole."

" Exactly. Provided they could do it. But that don't explain matters a bit. Who in blazes is he?"

" Looks as though you ought to know. He mentioned his name loud enough, and said it over reyther slow. If you didn't catch it you weren't listening half as hard as I thought you were. Jaimeson is the handle he goes by; and I have reason to think the first letter of his be frontis title is Jean. By the way! I reckon Paddy isn't hurt half as bad as they thought he was. Looked to me as though he was only creased; a little blood drawn and no bones broken. Pity the fool hadn't bitten a trifle deeper. As soon as the boys get over the first flush they won't care to carry the thing any further. Hardly the square thing to hang a stranger, and no corpse to back up the verdict. It might have worked a bit ago, but by this time it's too late."

" Right you are. If no one gets him on the wing to-night, there won't be a whisper against him to-morrow morning. The gang back there, howling for 'be-lud' will go back, and when they see that Paddy has life enough in him to stand treat for the boys they will take a drink and start fresh. To-morrow they will be willing to drink with the stranger till something fresh starts."

" You have it straight, and as he seems to be one of the drinking kind, there is where we may be able to get the dead medicine on him."

" Always provided he comes back. But if he gets away safe, and takes a sober thought over matters, it's just as likely that he will think he has had enough of Sunrise. I would if I saw a whole town rise right at me."

" Don't be alarmed. He will be back, fast enough. He's got to come back, and got to be hung unless he drops out in a serimage. The first would suit a heap sight better, I'm a-thinking; but we won't find many of the boys as anxious for the job as Paddy was, now that they see he is so handy with his irons."

" More of them that would sooner pop him over in the dark, I reckon. And what's the matter with winding up the job after that fash-ion? That would save trouble and risk."

" But it won't fill the bill. The contract is that he is to be either killed in a row, or taken off by the rope. Some other way might do as well, but there is a party who might kick, and say it was not the way agreed on. And where, then, would be the ducats? One can't be too careful when he's dealing with a man behind the screen."

" And the man behind the screen—who is he? Looks as thought you might be able to let me in on the ground floor."

" You tell; I can't."

" Oh, coma, now! That sort of thing won't go down. Not very likely you would deal such a game without knowing the points, and who kept the cues."

" Honor bright! That's the solid truth. It's coin I am after; and when I find I can't have the rest of the earth I take it and say no more. The party put up the earnest money without letting on who he—or she—was. Of course, I did what I could to find out the rest, but when I couldn't I let things slide, and stayed right by cold business. If that don't suit your lordship you are not compelled to move another step. I reckon I can trust you, even if Mr. Jaimeson should happen to be found with his toes turned up. It will be a neat little game when it is finished; and I don't reckon you will be able to

pick a hole in it; and if you could you wouldn't show it to outsiders. Talk quick, for if you stay out there is no use to be mooning around here in the dark. There will be nothing more to say."

" Oh, dry up on that! You don't suppose I am yearning to throw away the chance, even if I do have to go it blind. What you say goes. At the same time, I would like to know a little more about the party in the brush. We might not have so much leverage on him; but, don't you see that he is going to hold a tremendous percentage on us?"

" On me. In this matter the party is going to know me—and no one else. If I am trusting my neck you ought not to be so much afraid of yours. And if I should find out anything more—as, of course, I shall—you will be onto it almost as soon as I will."

" That's all right, but—I swear, I don't believe that we are alone in the shed. Hold fast while I try a shot over in yonder corner."

CHAPTER III.

JEAN JAIMESON CHANGES BASE.

" HOLE on—hic! It's nobody but ole Unkel Ezry; wot in blazes are yer goin' to do that fur?"

It seemed time to make some move, for Jim Turner had swung up his revolver, cocking it as it came; and he was not a man to linger on his aim, or hesitate when he had once declared his intentions. Out from the corner lurched a figure with hands well up, and bringing along with it an unmistakable and all-pervading aroma of bad whisky.

It was just as well that no time had been lost, for Turner meant every word he said; and although when he spoke it was not at all certain that there was any one in the corner, he meant to shoot all the same. The action disconcerted him somewhat, and that very fact made him slow with his trigger, since it was natural he should do the very thing he had not intended. Then he took in the object which had presented itself, and was willing to bide his time for a little.

" Step out here and let us see what you look like," he ordered, sharply, still keeping his weapon poised.

" If you are not the man who plugged Paddy Porter we want to know what you are doing, skulking around here. Speak slow, and mighty straight, for the boys are not showing much loving-kindness to-night, and if I turn you over to them they will swing you off just too quick."

" Dunno nothin' about no Paddy Porter—hic! On'y ole Unkel Ezry, an' him all alone. It's blame hard lines ef a feller can't git a chance ter take a snooze in this hyer ole shed 'thout some 'un wantin' ter pufferate him 's though he war a wile cat. Le'mme 'lone an' I won't—hic—boozzer yer, but I'll be ding-blasted ef I stan' any non-shense myself. F yer wants ter shoot, why, blame yer, shoot!"

And down on the ground, to a sitting posture, dropped the ragged figure, which could be more distinctly seen as it came to the front of the shed; and there was an obstinacy in the tones of the voice that could only belong to a drunken man or a fool.

So Tom Benham seemed to think, for his hand fell upon the shoulder of his companion.

" Hold on a moment, Jim. I saw the galoot meandering around town last night, and unless my eyes are rot more than half as sharp as I think they are, he's all genuine, and not at all the sort of game we want to fly for. Let up on him till we see whether it is worth while to go for the coroner. There might not be much trouble about getting a verdict all right; but lead costs money."

" Genuine or not he is a cursed spy," retorted Jim, though lowering his hand.

And in a whisper he added:

" He smells like a rum-cask and acts like a fool, but I reckon he has heard too much for his health, and the sooner he goes over the divide, the better it will be for yours truly, together with all friends and relations. Stand back a little and let me send him in out of the dew."

The latter part of this was spoken in a louder tone, as though it might be intended to reach the ears of Uncle Ezra.

If there was any design to alarm, the failure was signal. The tangled head dropped over upon the ragged breast, and the sound of a snore drowned the sibilant threat.

Was this—could this be—acting? Without giving any warning of his intention Benham stooped silently, and drawing a match across his boot-heel, held the little flame directly in front of the face of the sodden sleeper, which he roughly upturned with his other hand.

" G'way—hic!" snorted Uncle Ezra, apparently not half awake.

He accompanied his exclamation with a thrust which caused him to altogether lose his balance, and he came at full length along the ground, at the feet of Benham, where he at once began to snore as lustily as ever.

The match burned to an end, which the man threw away absently, and then his fingers once more closed on Turner's arm, silently drawing him away.

There was either some occult communication in the touch, or else Jim was impressed by the

Double-Cinch Dan.

manner of his pard. He followed without a word, though all the time keeping his eyes on the figure which began to take on more of a mystery than ever. At the distance of a dozen yards from the shed Benham halted.

"See here, Jim: about how much of the scheme did I give away, anyhow?"

"Just about all there was of it," responded Turner, in the same low tone.

"But I reckon I mentioned no names, when you were so infernally inquisitive?"

"Nary name was there mentioned but yours and mine. I don't know a blame bit more than he does; and maybe not as much."

"Then, suppose we let it go at that, and keep our eyes open. I don't feel half as desperate as I did, and that's a fact."

"I should think not when you are taking chances like those—leaving that old coon to walk away with a mine of wealth, if he has the sense to work it. How long do you suppose it will be before he has the whole story? And then, if anything happens to this Jaimeson you won't be apt to hear from it. Of course not. That's not generally the way it works when you leave a tag end sticking out because you are too lazy to cut it off."

"Don't be a fool, Jim. When I do a thing of that kind it's always because I have a reason for it; and this time I have one that is spelled with a great big R, though perhaps you wouldn't see it in the same light if I tried to explain it to you. Don't you look back. I am keeping an eye on him and you can bet rocks that he don't move without my seeing it. It looks dog-gone natural, the way he is lying there; but he has both eyes wide open, unless I am away off."

"Oh, get off the roof! You are rubbing it in too thick for an old pard to stand it very long. Speak up, and be done with it. Who do you think the old fellow is: and if there is any danger about him why didn't you let me salt him down when I had him covered? I would just as soon have done it as not, and now the danger, if there is any, would have been over."

"Perhaps it would, and perhaps it wouldn't. That would just depend. Did you ever hear of Double-Cinch Dan?"

"Holy Moses! You don't mean?"

"That is just about what I do mean. Mind you, I may be all wrong; but if there is any one wants to bet, I am open to a small wager of coin that yonder fellow is the man."

"But what in thunder is he doing around here? This is clean out of the range of his stamping grounds."

"Exactly what I want to find out. We might have killed him; but how about his pards? You never knew Daniel to forget to look out for his own precious safety. Somewhere, within stone's throw, they are lurking, and if you had pulled trigger we would never have got away alive—or, at least, we would have had a fight for it."

"And if I had thought who it was, I would have downed him anyhow. It would have been time enough to worry about his pards when they came to the front. He knows our game, even if he don't know who is behind us."

"Let it go at that for the present. I guess there is no danger of his hurting either of us to-night. And meanwhile, we are after him. What we want to know is, who is behind him. Who is he after? What was he doing snoopin' around there? When he goes away, you bet there will be some one following him, ready to find out what there is at the other end. And if it turns out that it's not Dan Garland, after all, there is no great harm done. A ragged old bummer, like he seems to be, wouldn't know t'other from which when he gets his eyes open again; and there is not much chance that he would know us."

"All right, pard, if that's the way you see it; but if I had thought I had an iron pointed at Dan Garland I would have pulled trigger, and you and I could have talked the rest over afterwards just as well."

Instead of taking offense at the growl, Benham broke into a hearty laugh, low though it was.

"And maybe fired at the pigeon and hit the crow. If I am fooled it is a heap sight good joke on us, but all the same we will know where he goes to, and if it turns up there is a bloodhound under those rags, it will be a cold day for the bloodhound. It may be he is after Captain Bloom, for it's big game he likes best; but everything is fish that comes into his net."

"And we were big enough to break it once, if I'm not 'way off."

"Never mind that. You will have to keep an eye on him till I can send a shadow. If there is a move before he comes, you know enough to see it through. Otherwise, join me at the Light. When Double-Cinch Dan camps on a trail, it means danger to the fellows at the other end. If we are the fellows, it is time we are taking care of our precious necks."

"Only one way to do that, if it has failed when they tried it before. Hustle around and don't leave me alone with him too long if you want to find us both living when you come to look for us."

"None of that—for the present. Spider Billy will be loafing around at the Light, and I will have him here in five minutes by the clock. So

long, and don't let him play any roots on you. He don't mean business yet or he would have made the pull. By the time he gets ready to move it must be far over the range."

"And the other fellow? Are we going to give him up?"

"Blast the other fellow! We will have to take him in in course of time, but we must take care of ourselves first."

Benham turned abruptly as he spoke and hurried away. During their conversation they had been strolling away from the neighborhood of the shed, but all the time in such a direction that by an almost imperceptible side glance a view could be had of its front, and the figure still to be seen, half revealed in the moonlight. At this point there was cover, and the two took advantage of it. It would have required a sharp ear to decide that there were not two men instead of one walking off behind the shrubbery; and a still sharper eye to detect the motionless figure crouching on the watch.

"I reckon Benham knows what he is talking about," muttered Turner, as he took a cautious peep through the branches which were screening him.

"It seems to me, though, that he dropped onto the cove in a monstrous hurry. Looks as though he must have been expecting him; and in that case he hasn't been telling me everything he knows. If it was any one but Tom I would think him an infernal fool. If Dan does spread himself on a disguise sometimes I don't think he could get that low down if he tried. And what would have brought him here on our trail when there are so many bigger fish in the swim that are worth his booking? It is money Daniel is generally after, and so far there is not much of that to be made out of us, more's the blessing. Wonder if Tom don't know more about him than he lets on, and wants to see what his game is, to make more money out of it by carrying news to the other side? That might work; but I'd sooner not take the risk. If he should be onto us there would be a heap sight of danger; and if he isn't now there is no telling how soon he might be. If I had my way I would let him have it now, and run the chances. It would be a sure thing and no mistake; and it will come to that anyhow."

And by way of experiment Turner raised his revolver once more, and took deliberate aim at the breast of the seemingly sleeping man.

"It would be just as e-a-s-y—"

For an instant Jim Turner saw more stars than mortal man ever observed in the heavens at one glance. Then he was lying senseless on his back, and Jean Jaimeson was throwing away the revolver which had been wrenched from his nerveless fingers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WITH THE COUGH.

As Turner went down Uncle Ezra raised up. The sleeping had all been a sham, and he had been watching the progress made by the man whom he had stumbled across in the shed. The moment he was sure that the spy could no longer have his eyes on him he was ready for business. He hurried over, though with a lurching, staggering gait which still might have deceived Tom Benham had he been there to see.

"Orful well done, that, pard. You throwed him cold ther fu'st clip. It are about time now ter make tracks afore any ov ther gang comes this hyer way. Reckon they'll be long in a holy minnit. Did yer ketch on ter what they war a-sayin'?"

"Yes; the latter part of it at least. This fellow was left here on guard until the other could send a shadow to take his place, and keep on your trail till they learned who you were and where you were going. They had their suspicions, but did not seem to be sure. If they hit the truth, then, I don't wonder at it. A precious pair of rascals they are; and if the leader of the two was to be believed you are the very man they would be apt to fear most, for they gave you the name of one who was and is a terror to all evil doers."

"Don't reckon they're ez sharp ez they think ef they called me ary thing but jest Unkel Ezry. That's ez good ez wheat; but I warn't aware that it war known hyer fur it's full val'y. I've bin a bowlin' terror in my time, but latterly I've bin a-singin' small, an' I warn't aware that my repurtashun hed bin trav'lin' faster than me body. Le'ss git out ov this, though; an' you kin be givin' me a p'inter ez we go 'long. It mou't not be healthy ter contunner my snooze in ther old shed; an' it wouldn't be ther thing fur you ter be found hyer when they git back. This time they'd use ther rope, sure."

"Yes. Better to move out; though after what I heard the villains say I suspect my best and safest plan would be to get quietly back to the hotel. The flurry is over to-night; and by to-morrow I will be able to take care of myself. These outrages are never perpetrated by daylight."

"Kayrect; an' ef yer don't mind I mou't go along with yer. I've bin thar long ernuff ter git ther jag most all slep' off; an' there's time fur a heap sight ov bizzness 'twixt now an' to-morrorn mornin'."

"I tell you, man, if you are the thief-taker

they say you are—if you really are Dan Garland, the detective—you had better change your garb before you try to do any more business. They have you spotted down fine, and will kill you without hesitation or remorse. You were the only man who seemed willing to come out to my help, and so I feel a little like doing you a good turn, whether you are Double-Cinch Dan, or only the broken-down bummer your appearance indicates. If you are the first, I give you the warning. If you are the other, I can give you a starter that will take you to some safer section of the country. I am well enough heeled to be able to afford a little gratitude. It is cheaper to chip in now than it would be later on."

Uncle Ezra listened to the end with owlish gravity, and then gave a deep chuckle.

"I like yer nerve; but I can't say much fur yer judgment. He, he! Me Dan Garland? I guess not. Au'ef I war, Dan'l wouldn't bluff worth a cent. Much obleeged ter you fur tryin' ter do me a good turn; but I reckon ther ole man kin paddle his own canoe; an' ef you don't want ter be seen 'longside ov him, say ther word an' he'll give yer a wide berth. Me Double-Cinch Dan! He, he!"

"It does sound ridiculous, and that is a fact; but, stranger things have turned out the truth. If you do not wish to confide in me let it go. Here we are, and the way seems to be open. If you want to share my pocketbook, and then slide on to the next town, say the word. Otherwise, perhaps it is as well that we should part. It will not be the healthier for either of us to be seen coming in together."

"Reckon I'd better not bu'st yer too soon. Guess I'll save yer up ter ther time I'm a needin' help a leetle more. I'm toller'ble flush jest now, an' ther longer I stay in Sunshine ther better I'll be heeled. Oh, I'm a terror, an' when I go fur ther' wealth I bu'st 'em wide open."

Uncle Ezra seemed to be on perfectly good terms with himself, and for the rest of the world he did not care a cent.

Nor did he make any movement which might show that he was intending to heed the wish of his companion. He continued to slouch along by his side, now and then giving what was at least the suggestion of a drunken lurch.

Jaimeson did not insist. He had given his hint, and now made no answer to the vaporings of the drunken man—if drunk, indeed, he really was. They strode on, side by side, without further conversation.

So far they had met no one.

The crowd that had been roaring around the street after the disturbance at the Living Light, had disappeared. Some few, perhaps, had continued the search down the canyon, and the rest had lost their enthusiasm, and returned to their avocations. As they had come by a roundabout way the two were not likely to meet Spider Billy on his way to take up the trail of the tramp, and so far there was no commotion to announce the discovery of the unfortunate Jim Turner.

Perhaps it was through design, but just as likely it was second nature. The two stepped so lightly as they neared the center of the town that their footfalls made no sound. Though there was the hum of the life that was around them was indistinct, and scarcely to be noticed.

Then, the silence of the night was suddenly broken by a cough.

It was not an ordinary cough, given by one to clear his throat when it was irritated by some trifling cause; but a regular graveyard, explosive, racking, long-continued affair, which seemed to break its owner all up. After the cough subsided there was a grunting and a wheezing, that lasted for several minutes. Evidently, whoever was the sufferer, he had a hard struggle to again catch his breath.

"Kim in consumshun's g'astly form," whispered Uncle Ezra to his companion. "Strikes me that pore galoot are booked fur over the range. An' it are a dasted pity, too. He coughs like ez though he war a man ov good sense, an' a heap ov eddicashun."

"Can't say that I can distinguish much difference between that cough and any other cough of the same size and strength. But it does sound as though he was going to choke before he gets through his present grapple with it. Suppose you stay here while I go over and take a look at the victim."

"Jest wo't I war goin' ter perpose fur meself, but whar's ther differen's? Drive on, you."

Jaimeson did not wait for any further dissertations, but turned abruptly, and started for the other side of the street. If his ears had not deceived him the sound came from that direction.

Uncle Ezra watched him go with what seemed a puzzled look. He removed his battered old tile, and scratched his frowzly head. In spite of what they had heard he could see nothing, and he was not apparently altogether satisfied in his own mind in regard to the matter.

"Mighty willin' ter leave his Unkel Ezry," he muttered, with a hitch of his shoulders, and a shake of his head.

"Are it ther trackshun over thar, er ther perpushun over hyer, w'ich sots him off so kinder on ther jump? He don't seem ter take no stock in ther ole man, an' that's kinder mean, so it are, 'sid'r'in' w'ot he's done fur him, an' how I'm

goin' to stick closter than a brother. Looks ez though he war a-runnin' now. Ef so, it mou' be in order fur Ezry ter be walkin'. Wot's ther matter with me a-seein' this hyer thing out? Cordin' ter ther outlook I be enlisted fur ther war, an' sounds ez though this war ter be et least a little skirmish."

Hesitating no longer he stepped off in the same direction, and though he did not for a moment neglect to maintain the identities, it might have been noticed that he stepped a little faster than he had been doing, and kept his gaze directed immediately ahead.

Upon separating Jean Jaimeson cast several glances over his shoulder, in a furtive way, to make sure that he was not followed, meantime proceeding leisurely enough in the direction of the now wheezing individual, whose dark outlines he thought he could distinguish, just at the corner of the second building to his right.

He stepped upon what was popularly known as the sidewalk, just as this figure melted away around the corner of the building, and as yet he had failed to make out whether it was at all familiar, or to what sort of an individual it might belong.

"A little more steam, Mr. Jaimeson, or you will lose him yet," was his thought, as he quickened his pace.

"I don't suppose it will be any of my funeral, but I may as well be in at the death if he is going to expire. He's at it again, and it don't seem as though he would possibly be able to survive."

Sure enough, the cough broke out louder, even, than before; and as he turned the corner a man staggered back, and dropped wearily into his arms.

The burden, though unexpected, was promptly received.

"Hello, stranger! brace up or you will make a die of it yet! You want to try and let up on that a little. Don't take it so earnest. It's bad for the nerves and death on the lungs. Let me pat you a little on the back, and perhaps a drop of whisky would help you over the rifle. There, you are getting your breath again. Wonder if you have these little spells often. You are the man with the mouth-organ, aren't you?"

He spoke without any definite purpose, but his ministrations, such as they were, must have been going to the right place, and at the mention of the whisky the load in his arms became animated to a wonderful degree. The little old man drew himself somewhat away, and reached out one hand eagerly, as Jaimeson, with his otherwise disengaged hand, drew a flask from his hip pocket.

"If you please, sir, don't," said a childish voice, and a set of little fingers suddenly and unexpectedly closed on his wrist. "It only makes him worse, and raises the devil besides. He don't mean to do wrong, but whisky makes him old Satan himself."

CHAPTER V.

A PALACE IN A PUDDLE.

JEAN JAIMESON knew as much about human nature as the average man, and at the words of warning he thrust away the flask, after one hasty glance to make sure that there was no immediate and absolute necessity to use the stimulant. He was well aware that there were constitutions upon which whisky had precisely the effect described, and since he had recognized the sufferer he could well believe that strong drink had been the curse which dragged him down. From the old musician his gaze wandered to the individual who had appeared upon the carpet just in time to prevent the administration of the dose.

There was not much of her, and what there was looked like hard times personified, if he made no mistakes in the uncertain light by which he viewed her.

The calico dress which draped the child had been much too big for her in the first place, and the skirt of it was gathered up and held over her arm. It was in tatters, however, and there were streamers enough dragging behind to sweep the ground, while the waist alone seemed to reach almost to her knees. Evidently, she had picked up a discarded old garment which any one else would have thought had entirely outlived its usefulness. No one would have thought of offering such a thing to a child of her size.

On her head there was a broad-brimmed straw hat, which fitted somewhat more snugly, since it had been taken up in a careful fold, and pinned into something like shape. The brim was thrust up straight from her face, and the whole thing set on her head with an attempt at a jaunty air that had more of sadness in it than the child could know.

"And who are you, little one?" asked Jaimeson, his eyes lingering on the sharp young features which were upturned, so that what light there was could hit them fairly.

"Me? Oh, I'm the Kitten. Gran'pa says if you stroke me softly I purr just like a cat, and that I can see the rats in the dark better than any other person but himself. I guess I know what is what—and so I ought to. I have been trying long enough to learn."

There was wisdom beyond her years in the

voice of Kitten, and Jaimeson was more than ever interested in the two.

"You must take better care of gran'pa, then. He has no right to be wandering around this time of night till he gets rid of that cough; and the streets of Sunrise after dark are not the place for a little lady of your size to be loitering. Have you got a place to hang out at? If so you had better lead the way and I will help the old gentleman along. I am afraid that I owe him something, and if so I want to make it right. I had intended to hunt him up anyhow, and this meeting seems quite lucky."

"Oh, yes, we have a home, if that is what you mean, and if you want to come along with us we will show you where it is. I would like it ever so much if you came. I am afraid that I couldn't get gran'pa there if I tried it alone. He is awful tired, I know."

The tone of the answer was just as devil-may-care as ever, but there was something in the pleading look intercepted by Jaimeson which made him more than ever determined to see the strange couple to their lodging-place if they were at all willing to go in that direction. He knew that look was involuntary, and gave it the more value for that very reason.

Meantime the man had been regaining his breath. When the second spasm of coughing left him, he was weak enough to accept the ministrations and then the support of the stranger without protest, and it was doubtful if he heard a word of what passed. As Jaimeson saw that he had somewhat recovered, he tucked the limp arm under his own and nodded to the child:

"Lead on, then, and if he is not strong enough to walk, I guess I can carry him, if the distance is not too far. I don't think he is the heaviest of loads."

"Gran'pa Adam is better than he looks, and could walk a mile, if he had to, now the cough is over. But it is not so far as that where we live now. It is ever so much better a place than where we used to be, and when we strike pay-dirt I am going to fix it up real nice. I wouldn't want everybody to come there yet, but I don't mind you. I think you a pretty square sport."

"Thanks, little one, for your good opinion. I shall try to justify it before we get through with each other."

The Kitten said nothing more, but hurried on ahead at a rate which required considerable exertion on the part of the others to keep up with. Gran'pa Adam hung somewhat heavily on the arm that was within his own, and his steps dragged wearily before they had gone far. From the first he had remained utterly silent.

"Here we are," said the Kitten, just as Jaimeson was beginning to argue with himself the advisability of allowing the old man a rest.

"I haven't got it fixed up as nice as I mean to, but just you wait. Oh, it will be real nice, and don't you forget it. Wait a minute, and I will light the lamp. You might stumble over something if I didn't, and we can't afford to have you breaking our china—not till gran'pa strikes pay-dirt, anyhow."

Still carrying her train, the strange child darted into the cabin in front of which she had made a momentary halt. In a brief space of time there was a glow from within, coming out through the open door so broadly that Jean was able to catch a view of the interior, which was even more squalid than he had anticipated. He knew then what to expect, and was able to march in with a face under perfect control, so the child could read none of his real thoughts.

The but, for it was nothing more, was evidently one which had been a temporary refuge for some man who had abandoned it without a second thought, when his interests or his whims led him in some other direction. It had been roughly built in the side of a low bank, the stones in its sides having been thrown together in haste, and the roof consisting of a layer of poles covered with sods and dirt. There was a rude fireplace in the further end, and the floor was simply the well-trampled ground.

The lamp was the best article of furniture, if not the only one. It stood upon an old cracker-box, which was the sole sign of a table about the hovel, and there were two bundles of rags to suggest that the inhabitants sometimes wanted to sleep, and did not intend to do so on the bare floor.

And yet, somehow, the place had the appearance of cleanliness, even if it was without the reality. The bare ground was swept, and the cast-off stub of a broom in a corner was the implement with which it had been done. At one side of the fireplace were a couple of old tin pans and a cracked skillet. On the other was a rusty tin cup, and a section of a pail which hardly appeared to be capable of holding water.

"Here you are," said the Kitten, dropping her trail, and making a sweeping gesture.

"The rest of the furniture is not much to speak of, but the lamp is just beautiful. And now gran'pa has money we can get oil to burn in it every night. We didn't have it lighted for a long time, because I was saving it up. We never knew when he was going to be sick, and it is bad for him to have one of his spells in the dark."

It was hard to tell whether the enthusiasm over

the lamp was real, but there could be no doubt in regard to the truth of her statements as to the spells of her grandparent, after the sample Jaimeson had witnessed. He turned now to the old man, whose arm had glided from his own as he slid to the floor.

He was there, propped up against the old wall, and looking at his guest with a keener eye than Jaimeson had expected to meet.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you?" asked the latter, with his hand in his pocket. "You look as though you had come through the row at the Light without any scars, but perhaps I was the cause of your financial ruin. There was something like a little fortune in that hat, and if you did not recover it I am ready to make it good. I had my reasons for doing what I did, and wanting to avoid making a contribution was certainly not one of them. By my count, the boys had put up in the neighborhood of ten dollars when the unfortunate interruption came. Did you get any of it? If you didn't, here is what will make you even. If you did, you will be a regular millionaire, and the Kitten can furnish her rooms."

"Thanks! You mean well, but you offer too much. Make it less. A dollar I might accept, since others gave as much, but more than that, never. They were too busy thinking of you to care for anything else, and I was not too proud to hunt for what was really mine, since it was for Kitty. I gathered it all up, and have it here, except a coin I gave to the child. I was waiting for her to come back to me when I had the spell you heard. Such things do not often come to me, but when they do it is dreadful."

"Not so sure but what it serves you right. What business have you in throwing away your life and hers in a place where starvation is pretty near a certainty, if you only wait for it. The child, at least, is worthy of better things, and now that I look at you a little closer I think you might be able to provide them for her. You are not as young as you once were, but there is nothing constitutional the matter."

"Perhaps, perhaps! I was not always this sort of a wreck, and I hope not to remain this way. I have had a bad run of luck; I have been sick; for a year I had the rheumatism so that most of the time I scarce could move. But, Kitty stayed with me all the time. She is wiser than she looks, and knows how to keep the life in her old gran'pa when all the rest of the world gives him up. We love each other, Kitty and I, and to-night has been a great step, great step. I am glad, though, that you did not give me the whisky. I felt as if I wanted it, oh, so badly. But, it is just as the Kitten says. Yes, it would have made me old Satan himself. If I had taken the taste into my mouth all this would have gone. I would have forgotten the child, my oath, and everything. I was so afraid they would force me to taste it in the saloon. I know how such crowds are, and how hard it would have been to object if some one had wanted to show himself my friend. You did me a greater favor than you knew, for it would have come if they had not all been thinking about you. And I was dreading it all the time. The fear of it was taking away my strength, and while I was waiting for Kitty to come back I was beginning to long for it worse than I have done for six months. It was a narrow escape, ever so narrow! And then, I was hungry, besides."

That last was the frankest confession of all, and gave the true explanation of the greatness of his temptation. It made the young man start.

"Bless my soul! And I never thought of that. How is it now? The hour is a little late, but I think I can fill up your larder if you will wait a little. I can go around to the hotel and get you some cold meat that will stick to the ribs better than anything else. Then it would be but little trouble to get up a cup of strong coffee, and with a chunk of bread to work in with the meat there you are. Hold hard as you are. I will be back in a jiffy."

Before they could stop him he was up and off.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHOT FROM BEHIND.

"THAT will be better than the crackers," said Kitty, producing a small bundle from under her dress, and placing it in the hand of the old man.

"You can nibble at them, though, till he comes back, and they will do to put on the table along with the rest. I wonder if he will forget the coffee. And if he don't, what shall we make it in? True as you live, he is just the nicest man I know except yourself. When we get down to pay-dirt, and have things as we are going to have them, I want him to come to dinner with us. My won't we be fine then? This is nothing to what we will have."

"He seems a nice young man, but you can't always tell," answered the old man, putting down the bundle unopened.

"Don't talk too much to him about pay-dirt, though, if he does come back. He may be bad, after all. It don't seem natural he should bother with us unless he has an ax of his own to grind. And he may not return. They were wanting to hang him at the saloon, and if he meets the men

who are looking for him he will go up at the end of a rope only too soon. We will wait, though; we will wait."

The experience of old Adam had made him suspicious; and small blame to him for it. It was something of a surprise when, in a much shorter time than he had thought possible, he heard the sound of returning footsteps.

"Here you are, my old friend. Thought I couldn't go wrong, and I did better than I thought. If we can scare up a little fire the coffee will be the hotter for it, but it will do at a pinch as it is. Here's your bread and meat; and here are a few furbelows for the Kitten. Will you take things as they are, or will you wait for the fire?"

"What a question! Now, immediately, of course. When a man has eaten nothing since morning, and not much then, he waits for nothing. This is splendid. Will you sit up and join us?"

"Scarcely. But, don't stop on my account. I have nothing else on hands, and can wait with as much comfort as pleasure until you have satisfied that appetite. Take it moderately, now, and remember, the longer you are at it the more unalloyed pleasure you are going to get out of the meal. I have been hungry myself, and discovered that the curse of it was, one filled up so fast when the time came to break the fast. One's capacity is so very limited, after all."

The Kitten was not waiting to do the agreeable. She opened the bundle brought by Jaimeson, and placed it on the cracker-box, together with the rusty tin cup from the fireplace. She gave one of the bundles of bedding to her grandfather, to serve as a seat, motioned Jean to the other, and placed herself on the ground by the side of the box.

"When gran'pa gets stronger he will carry in a couple of stones to sit on. Just now we must use what we can get, if it does take the polish off of the other furniture. This is real comfortable. Better than pay-dirt, because there is not so much work about it. Nothing to do but to eat, drink and be merry."

Adam silently accepted the situation, and ate with caution and relish. Kitty was hungry herself, but attended to the wants of her grandfather first of all. She held the coffeepot which Jaimeson had brought, with a proud air, filling the rusty cup as grandly as though it was of the finest china, and offered the bread and meat as though the expanse of cracker-box was limitless, and his eyesight might fail to take in the delicacies before him. Jean sat on the bundle and watched her in silent amusement.

The child was older than at first sight she had seemed, though even now it was hard to give a satisfactory guess at her age. She might be ten, and it was possible that she was fourteen. She looked like the one and acted like the other. With such a ridiculous dress on it was really folly to hazard a guess. It disguised her figure and distorted her conversation. Was she older than she looked? With the manner of a child there was at times the judgment of a woman. And certainly the two together made a worthy study. In a few words Adam had explained the cause of their condition; but that did not make clear why they accepted that condition so calmly. Certainly, they were used to better things.

The banquet came to an end, and Kitty began to gather up the fragments. Heartily as both had eaten, there was enough provision left to last for a day or so at a pinch, and prosperity had not made them spendthrifts. When they were transferred to the inside of the cracker-box, and the lid carefully replaced, Jaimeson drew out a couple of cigars, and handing one to the old man, proceeded to light the other himself.

"Now," said Jean, when he saw that Adam was in a fair state of physical enjoyment, "you can tell us all about it, and we will see what is to be done. You certainly don't mean to keep on living this way a day longer than you can help."

"I have told you all there is to tell, save that my full name is Adam Appleby. When I said that for over a year I had been down on my luck I gave you the full history. Anything more would be only a waste of words. There is nothing to be done, save to wait. I can live for a month, now, thanks to the generosity of the patrons of the Living Light. By the end of that time I will be strong enough to work, and that is all I ask. I do not know what there is at the bottom of my claim, but I feel sure it will pay for all expenses, and the year of suffering thrown in. I can only give you my thanks, just now, for your kindness, but I hope and believe that the time will come when I will be in shape to offer still more."

"Nonsense, man. To tell the truth, I feel as though I had done you more than a little wrong; and I want to make it all right while I have the time and ability. If it had not been for me there is no knowing where the generosity of the boys would have stopped. Not short of double the wealth you actually corralled, I am very sure."

"And if they had given me four times the amount, and added a single drink of the accursed stuff, of what benefit would their silver ever

have been to Kitty and me? No, it was your interruption which saved me. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing at present. And yet, the time may soon come when you can do much, very much for me. In that case, can I count on you?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

There was something of lingering hesitancy in his tone, the more marked because of the frank promptness with which Kitty took up the theme when the old man had finished speaking.

"You can depend on us, every day in the week, and every week in the year. You have been a friend when we needed one, and I only wish you had met us sooner. There is nothing proud about me. I won't beg, but I don't like to starve. If we needed anything more you should have the chance to give it to us—or lend it till we get down to pay-dirt. That last is the best way to put it."

"Have you got a claim?" asked Jaimeson, turning sharply to Adam Appleby, and asking the question, as though he had forgotten what had but lately been said in regard to it.

"I had, and ought to have, though I have not seen it for a week. It can't be jumped, for I have done all the work required, and I do not believe any one in the camp would care to bother with it. I would not if I had not found—but, why speak of it now? I will be there to-morrow. Come to see me if you care to and I can show you all there is to see. Perhaps I am a fool to waste my time on it; but there are a great many other fools for company, and some of them will die rich. I do not care for that myself, but I want to leave something behind for the Kitten."

"Which means that for the present you have had enough of me. I should have thought of it myself. You are tired, worn out. You want your rest. All right. I will bid you good-night. I may be around to-morrow. In any event I will see you later. Good night to you, and to Miss Kitty. If we live it will not be long before we meet again."

He bowed himself out of the hovel as grandly as though he was departing from a palace, and for a little while the two could hear the sound of his vigorous steps fading away in the darkness.

"I don't understand it," thought Jaimeson, as he increased the distance. "It hardly seems possible a man like he is could be reduced to such straits; and yet, out here, even stranger things have happened. Adam Appleby? Hum! That may be his name now, but I doubt if it always was. And then, the Kitten! What a cute youngster she is, with the air of a duchess, and the rags of a crossing sweeper—if they had such things here. Adam does not altogether trust me, but the child is my solid friend. And the two are worth the cultivating. If I was a little richer I might take a share in that mine of his just for the sake of setting him up. May do it anyhow, if the thing looks as though he could get a living out of it till something better turns up. With the fever on him there would be no use to try to get him away from here until he has the chance to work it off; though, for the sake of the little one, it might be tried. Strange what a fancy I took to her at first sight! We will see how things look in the morning. Daylight sometimes makes a difference, and it is as well that nothing further was said to-night."

He was harking back for the hotel while he was thinking. The street was apparently empty, and he had passed over the same route not long before without meeting any of the gang which had attacked him at the Living Light. He paid no particular attention to his surroundings, although it was part of his nature to be always on the alert when moving through a strange place after night.

Without any particular reason he suddenly halted, and looked back over his shoulder. It may have been that some faint sound reached him which he did not apparently comprehend, though it put him on guard. Instinctive or not, the move could not have been better timed to understand what followed. There was danger in the air.

Not more than ten paces distant stood a woman with an outstretched hand, and as he looked there was a flash of flame, and a loud report.

The shining tube lay in such perfect line for his breast, that if there had been no interruption, the bullet never would have gone singing a yard or two above his head.

But, at the critical moment when her finger was to tighten on the trigger, some one came rushing up from behind, and threw the arm upward in time to save Jaimeson.

He did not hesitate, but sprung forward. Whoever the woman might be, it was certain she had designs on his life, and he did not intend to grant her time for another attempt.

He failed to reach her, however. She wrenched her wrist from the grasp that still was on it, and turning, fled away like the wind, almost immediately being swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE EZRA LOOKS FOR A GAME.

JAIMESON made no pursuit. Instead, he halted in front of his preserve and uttered a little cry of astonishment. In the figure before him he recognized the Kitten.

"Gracious, child! What are you doing here?"

"Looking at you," was the somewhat pert answer, given with an assumption of bashfulness he was sure the child was far from feeling.

"Well, you have certainly earned the right. You may not have saved my life, though it looks mighty much like it. But what I wanted to know was, how you came to be on the spot so opportunely, and how you came to have the courage to interfere? You must have known there would be danger to you as well as to myself if you failed."

"But, of course, I was not going to fail. I went to the door to look about when you went away. We are so rich now I can begin to be afraid of thieves. She had been lurking there, all the time; and I saw her follow after you, and thought she had a pistol in her hand. I followed her to make sure she did not do you any harm; and so, don't you see, the mouse helped the lion. When you want me I shall always be very much around, as I promised you in there when you spoke to gran'pa about wanting help, by and by."

"Very brave in you, though it was perhaps a thoughtless thing, after all. How could you have imagined that you could be of any aid to me? I shall have to speak to Adam about you. You are a little too old, or a little too young, to be on the streets alone at midnight. But the woman? Have you ever seen her before? Do you know who she is? The attack is a mystery to me, and one that I would like to unravel. It is unpleasant to have a mad woman on one's trail, and if it is possible I would like to let her know of her folly."

"I am not sure, but I think I recognized her, though I never saw her looking like that before, if I am right. I thought it was the doctor. Don't mention it, though, till you are sure. She has not been a bad friend to us, considering how poor we were."

"The doctor! And who in the world is she?"

"Don't you know? But if you are a stranger here of course you don't. She is the woman who is the best doctor in all the camps. If there is any one sick they send for her first of all, and she can heal up a wound as well as the best of them, if not better. Madame Rolland is her name, though often they call her Madame Mabel. I would not have thought she would do such a thing unless she had a good reason for it. She came to see gran'pa once, when he had one of his bad spells, and made him better right away. He said he would not let her come again till he could pay her for what she had done. And I am sure that she never asked him for money once. But, that is his way. It's not mine, I can tell you! I am proud, but I won't starve; and I say that a dozen times a day, so as to be ready when the time comes. It is not here yet, but once or twice it looked awful close. If the bottom drops out of the Red Dog, as gran'pa sometimes says it may, I am sure I don't know what is to hinder it from getting to us in course of time."

Jaimeson laughed in spite of himself, and then added gravely:

"I hope starvation is far enough away, but always remember you have a claim on me, little lady. And to prove it, I am going to see you back home. There is no telling who may be in your road as you return. Perhaps the doctor, as you call her, will want to even up matters with you. I hope she did not recognize you, though I will try to convince her that she made a mistake when she sought my life—as she certainly did. If she once understands she will have a debt of gratitude, since you prevented her doing that which would have left regrets had she succeeded. Now, no more talking, but come on."

He held out his hand, but the Kitten frisked out of reach.

"You may go if you want to, but it is no use to waste the time. I am old enough, and ugly enough to take care of myself, and if the worst came to the worst maybe the shooting would not all be on one side."

"I can't say so much about your age, for that is a puzzler; but I can vouch for it you are not as ugly as you might be, and I should hate to swear you are not handsome. I shall see gran'pa about his getting you something more becoming than that dress. If you will glance into the looking-glass when you are trigged out in more suitable garments, I think you and I will be of the same opinion, about one thing at least."

There was more chatter of the same sort, and Jaimeson actually saw her inside the shanty door before making a fresh start in the direction of the hotel.

This time he had his wits about him more thoroughly than ever, and there was little danger an enemy could again approach so closely without the fact being known to him.

The doctor, however, had vanished for the night, and Jaimeson turned in without further adventure or question.

When he passed through what was known as the office, he noticed the several literers there by one careless glance, and brief as it was, he had taken in every face before it was ended. The little group was clustered together pretty well, so that to the average man some of the

countenances might have seemed to be hidden, but he got them all.

There was one man there who would have been surprised to know that the keen eyes had lingered longest on him, and located him on the instant, total stranger though he was.

The fellow was fully up to the average height, but his figure was so slender that he looked half a foot taller when seen by himself. His dress was nothing conspicuous, being neither particularly good, nor notably bad, and it must have been the manner he wore his clothes which gave them the appearance of the livery of the gaming table. His face was a keen, sharp-pointed one, with nothing but a bushy, long mustache to hide its angles and hollows, and the eyes that peered out from under his bulging forehead were black, small and beady. He was talking when Jaimeson came in, and his story was never interrupted for a moment, but Jean was sure he saw Spider Billy, and that the scout was there on the watch for him.

Why he had transferred his attention from Uncle Ezra to him was a query which naturally suggested itself, though it gave him little trouble. Probably the tramp had been holed for the night in some lodging-house, and required no further attention. Or it might be that he had slipped out of sight altogether.

Jaimeson had no particular interest in the old fellow, supposing him to be genuine, save that he would have returned one service by another, and done his best to prevent his being troubled by the men who had stumbled across him while following his own trail. The man, however, had received fair warning, and looked abundantly able to take care of himself. Without bothering his brain to any great extent over the matter he went to sleep. Had he been awake, and looking in the direction of his window, half an hour later, he might have seen the face of the Spider, close to the pane, as he peered into the room for an instant, while he made sure that his man was there.

Satisfied on that score, Spider Billy sprung down lightly from his perch and hurried away. He had already lost more time than he desired, for it took more moments than he cared to spare to withdraw himself from the company in which Jaimeson had seen him.

"The game is there, and won't be apt to stir again before daybreak, so it is just as well to go in to headquarters and ask for further orders. Blame 'em! They don't seem to know what they want themselves. It's dead sure I can't follow two men at once unless they keep together and no one knows whether these two have ever even seen each other. The doctor must be a leetle daft—though I would hate to tell her I thought so. She might poison me the next time she gave me a dose of pills. I thought she had him elected, and so she would if the kid had not chipped in. Maybe I would be a fool for my pains, but wouldn't it be a good scheme to let her know what I have seen? Perhaps there is wealth in the idea, and if it wasn't for the danger I'd carry it out, right off the handle, and see the boss afterwards."

He hesitated a moment, as though his mind was not fully made up which way to turn; but, finally, he stepped away steadily in the direction of the Living Light. For the present he had mastered his temptation.

He did not enter the saloon when it was reached. On the contrary, he moved around to the side of the building, to one of the windows, and without a perceptible pause said one word in a low tone, and then passed on to the door of an unpretending little shanty which stood at half a dozen yard's distance from the Living Light. Assuring himself as he went along that there was no one on the track, when he reached the door, which was at the rear of the building, he popped in with a celerity that showed he was anxious to escape observation.

The room appeared to be the habitation of some one in the most destitute of circumstances, and its furnishing was vile, but Spider Billy knew where he was, and did not trouble himself looking for an occupant. In one corner was a rude bunk, roughly built, and with every appearance of being firmly fixed in its place.

Approaching this he felt under one corner, turned a button, and then gave a push. The result was, an opening in the floor became apparent. Into this he dropped, the bunk settling once more to its place as he disappeared.

There was a subdued chuckle from another corner.

"An' that's ther sorter cattle they trot out ter foller yer Onkel Ezry! W'y, it looks too much like er boy play ter b'lieve. Ef I da'st ter foller I'd make a heap sight of diskivries, but I ain't caught in that trap this evenin'. Some other evenin' I'll do a heap sight better. Guess I've see 'bout ernough fur this time, an' I'll git out wile luck are runnin' my way. Some'un else may come ther kin keep his peepers peeled ter better 'dvantage, an' I don't want ter hev ter cut loose. Long ez they don't know I'm onter ther game I hev a p'inter ez may be wu'th su'thin'!"

And with no indication that he had gained in either sobriety or wit during his stay in the shanty, the tramp reeled through the doorway, and made his way around the building to the

main street, where he stood looking this way and that with an owlish gravity supposed to belong only to a drunken man.

"Ther night are young, an' money plenty," he muttered, loud enough to be heard by any casual passer; "w'ot's the matter with me lookin' round fur a leetle game?"

Hasty steps, not far away, told him some one was approaching from his rear, and he turned lazily as the pedestrian whom he had heard was almost at his side.

"Say, stranger, could you tell a pilgrim w'ot's out ov his jography whar ter find the place with ther biggest poker an' ther strongest whisky? I'm the chief frum 'wayback, an' I want ter sample ther town."

CHAPTER VIII.

WATCHING WITH THE WOUNDED.

SPIDER BILLY undoubtedly had traversed the same path before, for he did not hesitate, although he was in utter darkness when the trap went down once more to its place.

At the bottom of the narrow, rickety staircase he lit a match and looked around, though it was only to make himself sure of his bearings.

The light revealed a small cellar, corresponding in every way to the building above. It was rudely walled, the flooring was simply the ground, and it was littered with some old boxes that looked as though they might be abandoned, and did not at all seem inharmonious with their location.

They had their use, however, serving to mask a well-concealed doorway opening into a narrow tunnel of no great length. Without hesitation Spider Billy found the door, passed along the tunnel, and only halted when another door was reached. Here he made a quick succession of low raps, and waited while one could count ten. Then he whispered a single word, and, low though the tone was in which it was given, the password was heard by some one waiting to receive it. A door flew open, letting a flood of light into the tunnel, and Billy passed on.

Half a dozen men were standing together, talking in a low tone.

Instead of approaching them he veered toward the opposite corner, holding up his hand with the palm turned outward and toward the group.

The motion was a signal, and almost instantly one of the party came toward him. It was Tom Benham, the man who had set him on the trail.

"Don't know whether I ought to have come in or not, but there was a point I thought I had better report, though I was tempted once to use it myself, and try and make a stake out of it. I have both men holed, so there is little danger of their getting away, and if they do, things are fixed so I will know where they go to."

"That's all right, then, though unless it is very important it would have been better for you to have waited. We don't want to travel the road you came too often."

"Oh, you can bet your sweet soul no one saw me use it, and I didn't care to walk in the light for fear some one would see my phiz and haul me for something else."

"Never mind that. What is the pointer? There is business on board, and I can't give you too much of my time."

"May as well let you know how the thing ran from the start. When I got on the ground Jim had disappeared, and so had the other fellow, and I had to nose around for a while to find the trail. I got on to it by chance, and found the tramp had bunked in at Mike's, drunk as a lord, and was snoring as though he owned all out doors. I had a squint at him to make sure, and then thought it wouldn't be a bad thing to look around for the other cove that had the racket with Paddy. The rest of the boys had given it up as 'bad job, and it was my time to begin. Hit him the first clatter. He was hurrying along the street but not at all as though he was scared, and I thought if he was going to meet a man I might as well see who it was. Blest if I didn't hole him at the shanty Jacky Sands built, and he was talking like a Dutch uncle to a man and a girl. You know who they were, I reckon, for you had me keep an eye on them once when you thought the old fellow was going to bolt."

Benham gave a whistle of surprise at this intelligence. It was altogether unexpected, and seemingly not at all pleasant.

"The deuce you say! How did he come to get on to him, after the riot in the saloon? Did you hear what they said?"

"Not as much as I wanted to. I got as close as I dare, but they didn't exactly shout their conversation, and they seemed to be more interested in eating supper. I would have got on to it better, though, if it had not been I found there was some one else on the same lay that I was, and I had to keep out of her sight, for she was a woman. And I'll bet you a good round dollar you would never guess who she was."

"I might take your bet and win, but I guess I won't. Who was she?"

"Nobody but Madame Mabel. She seemed to have something in for them, too, for she held a gun all ready to use when the time came. When the tenderfoot left I found it was he she was after, and you can be sure I kept them in sight."

After a little she made up her mind to have a shot at his back, anyhow, and pulled trigger accordingly."

"You don't mean to say that she took him in out of the dew?"

"If not it wasn't her fault. She held straight enough, but it seemed the kid had been following the whole gang of us, though I don't think she caught on to me. The little one was right in town, and with grit enough to make a millstone. She knocked up the doctor's band before the flash, and the bullet flew a trifle high. Then the doctor lost nerve and ran away, and I scolded on ahead, and was in the office at the Little Lamb and talking to the soaks I found there before he got in. He went to bed, too, that I can swear to. So there you have the pair of them. You can do as you please and take your choice. I had a notion to see if the doctor wouldn't fork over a hundred to buy my valuable silence. On second thoughts I believed I would not. Some day I may need her, and she might put poison in the wound if she knew I had such a bitch on her, let alone what she would do if I had really used it."

"Good boy! It was well for you that you were faithful. If I know any thing about her she would just as soon have put a ball in you as not if she thought you were interfering in her game. And the boys would not be bashful about trying that same experiment if she did not, and they thought you were playing roots on them. I can't name any such figure as that, but you will be well paid for your trouble. Get back on the watch, and keep the old reprobate in view. And if you drop to pards of his, so much the better. He won't do anything until they turn up. That's his way—never to move till he has all ready for a clean scoop. You will know if it is necessary to come in again, so there is no use to give you further orders."

"All right, I'm off. No use to bother over the doctor?"

"Not a bit," answered Benham, emphatically. "It's a point worth knowing, but I will attend to that, and if there is any money in it you will have your share. Of course we will find out what it all means before we get through."

Spider Billy made no long delay after that. Benham's discipline was of the best. Those who worked for him understood that when on duty he would allow of no waste of time. Nevertheless, as he went away he had his own thoughts, and was by no means sure that Tom had been giving him what he considered a square deal.

"I reckon it's not my circus, after all; but if he don't know more about the madame and her affairs than he lets on you can count me a Dutch man. Still, if he is going to run the thing there is no use for me to put a paw in. One side or the other, I'd get burnt, sure."

If he could have seen or heard what was going on shortly after his back was turned he would have been more than ever convinced of the truth of his convictions.

By the time the business with Spider Billy was over the conference had broken up, and when Benham turned around he found that the men with whom he had been talking had slipped from the room.

The fact did not trouble him, for he nodded approvingly.

"All right. When they hear Dan Garland has an eye their way it don't take long for them to get a move on. They know he don't come nosing over the ground unless he is pretty sure he will find a trail worth the following. Pity we are not quite ready to make the grand dump, but if he can find out anything before he goes over the range he will have to do faster work than even Double-Cinch Dan has ever had credit for."

He moved away while he thought, passing through a doorway opening at the foot of a stairway leading upward, and no doubt to the Living Light. He did not descend, however, but stood for a moment listening. The hum of voices from above reached him, and it came to him for an instant that above the rest was one he could recognize. So certain was he that he gave a glance behind him to make sure all was safe.

The sight of what appeared to be a solid wall reassured him. He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, there. If he should come peeking about it is not much he could find that would be out of the way. Things hang together so well even Dan Garland would have a hard time finding where the screw is loose. And he can search the other side and welcome. Not much there to give him any light."

To the other side of the stairway he went, and here was no attempt at concealment. There was a plain door, which opened into what had apparently been designed as a basement and though boarded up at the point where the outside door once was, it was still used as a living room. It was sparsely furnished, several chairs being on one side, and a bed on the other.

Nor was the room tenantless, for the couch held Paddy Porter, whose head was bandaged and plastered after such a fashion that his own mother would not have known him, especially as his eyes were closed in a sleep that was not altogether natural.

Standing by the bedside, and bending over

Double-Cinch Dan.

the injured man in an attitude of concern, were two persons, who scarcely glanced at Benham as he came. And one of them was the woman known as Madame Mabel, the female doctor.

The other was a man who looked strangely out of place in that den, unless he too was there in a professional way. His face was clean shaven, his brow high, his face thoughtful, and his dress one entirely of solemn black. If a stranger had been told he was a parson, come to administer consolation at the bedside of a dying man, there would have been no difficulty in believing the story.

Of course he was not a parson, though that title had been applied to him more than once, by men who knew and feared him, too. He had even heard it without any audible expression of dissent, though the look he gave was enough to haunt the speaker for more than one day, and make him doubly careful how he wagged his tongue when Chet D'Aubegne was around. The very king-pin of the Sunrise was an uncomfortable man to jest about.

"Not a half bad thing, after all?" said Benham, advancing. "It got you two together in the natural course of events, even if it was a little rough on Paddy. I hope you both understand how the land seems to lie, and have made up your minds accordingly. As for me, I confess I feel like making the big dump, and then cut and run. There was no mistake about the news, it seems. Dan Garland is here, and if I am not wide off he is already on the trail!"

"Be a coward if you like; but it is too late to get away. When Garland himself gets on the ground he generally has the corral pretty well surrounded, and the safest way to be the first led out is to try a bolt. There is another plan that has hardly been seriously tried in the past. It will have to be worked now or some of us will go over the range before many days of waiting."

"Always provided this Garland of whom you all seem so much afraid, is after us. If he is not, what a mistake we would make to interfere with him at all."

Doctor Rolland had a voice of the softest and most musical when she chose, and it would have been hard for an outsider to believe she understood the meaning of what the parson had just said. And, harder yet—to think that the delicately beautiful woman who ventured this remark was as skillful a surgeon, and had handled as many gunshot wounds and knife-thrusts to the best advantage, as any man in the profession.

D'Aubegne knew her well enough to understand that she meant more than her words implied.

"You have a reason for what you say—out with it. If there is any other quarry in sight, there is no danger Double-Cinch Dan will switch off on a side issue; and, I swear, I would rest easier to be sure of the fact."

"I'm not so sure of that, either, if you are generally in the habit of telling the truth when you are talking to your lady friends. He may not be after us; but I have a very unpleasant suspicion he is after me."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOCTOR TRIES TO EXPLAIN.

"THAT is a distinction without a difference," said the parson, not much moved by the suggestion of the lady.

"If he should freeze onto one of us, the rest would be apt to go into the soup. What reason have you to think he is troubling his head about you? If there is any one who is above suspicion, it is certainly Doctor Rolland, who is so evidently spending her time going about doing good there is no room left for anything that might bring her under the notice of the prince of detectives. I don't want to force your hand if there are any cards back in it you don't care to show up, but I would like to know what put the idea into your head, if it is not a secret."

"You know well enough I have no secrets from you; and Benham is so very much in the family he don't count. If you would consider over the things you know, perhaps the idea would not seem so strange. And if the trampish looking individual unearthed by Tom is really the man he thinks he is, then I am almost certain I am right. The reason for the belief is simple, but it is good enough for me. He and the man you know as Jean Jaimeson are working together, and what that means I am only too certain."

"Are you sure of that? It is more than Benham suspected, and he has as keen a scent as any."

"As sure as I can be of anything not absolutely known. After the failure up-stairs, I looked around a little myself, though without making much progress. I thought the young man had taken to cover for the night, though I felt sure he was not as badly scared as some of the boys seemed to think. At first, you see, I was looking in the wrong direction. Perhaps I would never have found him if it had not been for seeing Benham and Jim Turner talking together. I did not know them at first, and got a little nearer to make out who they were."

"When I found out I would have left them; but Tom went away, and I did not care to let them know of my presence, so I kept quiet. If my attention had not been attracted to Benham at that moment I might have saved Turner the ugly blow he got over the head. It was just falling when I looked again in his direction. I was half in mind to shoot, but as the man who gave it seemed to have done his worst I waited to see what was in the wind. The result was, I saw Jaimeson and the tramp go away together, conversing as they went."

"Of course, I followed them, and when they separated I kept on after Jaimeson. Never mind about what happened after that. It is enough that the two had been together, one backing the hand of the other. That proves to me the two are working together—and if I am not the lode-star which draws Jaimeson in this direction I am more mistaken than I usually get. Remember, I had intelligence that both were coming."

"You ought to know, you are the doctor," said Benham, with a smile.

"Of course, I can't tell how much the man has in for you; but you must hate him, sure enough, to run the risk you are willing to. Suppose the kid had not been near to throw up your hand, what would you be doing now?"

"Just what I am—talking to you two. But how did you know anything about it? I thought we were alone on the spot, and I hardly believe you could have pumped the girl dry."

"Oh, no! Spider Billy was piping the fellow, and saw the whole of the affair. If he had not been a little afraid of you I think he would have been around before this in search of a hundred dollars, as a starter from the woman whose secret he knew. Of course, I asked him out of that when he hinted he had a mind to try it on; and of course he will keep mum."

"Much difference will that make. As I then felt I would have been willing to shoot him down before the whole town, and when I had told my story they would have said, served him right. The confounded villain has ruined my life twice at least, and one day we must get even. Here! if you want to listen I will give you the story as it is."

The doctor was more excited than either of her companions had ever seen her, and D'Aubegne did not seem altogether pleased with the exhibition.

"Steady, Mabel. I have heard enough of the story already to understand your virtuous wrath, and dwelling on it will only raise your anger to no profitable purpose. Let it go at that. I would a good deal sooner come down to bed rock, and discuss the business that is on the carpet now. If we could understand exactly what Dan Garland wants we would know better whether there must be extra speed made in his taking off. Of course, sooner or later, both of the men will have to cash in. That goes without saying."

"Then, listen to what I have got to say; and I will not waste any words if I can help it, though when I think of what I owe the wretch it sets me wild. To begin with, the man I pointed out to you was once my husband. He may be yet, for all I know, even if one of the territorial courts did pronounce me free. In dealing with him I am certain of nothing. When I ran away from school and married him the doors of my father's house closed on me, and from that day to this there has never been any sign of forgiveness in that direction—nor will there ever be, since the old gentleman is dead and buried. I think he died a trifle happier because he felt sure not a dollar of his million would ever come to me. It's a pity that even a dead man must sometimes slip up on the sure thing."

"A million, Mabel!"
The mention of the sum was a surprise to the parson, though he took his own time to showing it.

"Yes. I never mentioned the exact amount before, because, until to-day, I never knew it. It was only by the merest chance I heard of the death of the old man, and it took some time to get things in train to learn something about his affairs. This evening I received the intelligence I was waiting for, and in the same boat came this discarded husband of mine."

"Why in such haste to slay him, then? Would it not have been well to have heard what he had to propose? Of course he had an eye to getting his fingers on a share of the million, and small blame to him. I have two eyes looking that same way."

"And that is where you are mistaken. It did not take me very long to understand I had made the mistake of my life when I linked my fortunes with those of Oscar Hurd, but I will give the devil his due."

"He would not touch a dollar of it as coming through me; and if he is here, it is to do his best to see that I do not have the opportunity to touch it, either. As long as he lives you may be sure I will not. I might have thought his appearance here was simple chance had it not been for one thing. The heir by will is an uncle of mine, not particularly better than his outlawed niece—and when I saw Oscar in

confidential discourse with him, I could doubt no longer."

"Heavens! You don't mean to say—"

"That Adam Appleby is my uncle, and the heir to my father's million. That is the exact condition of affairs, and the only redeeming feature is that the old man does not know it."

"Did not know it, you had better say. Of course, if you are correct, he has been enlightened by this time."

"I am not so certain of that. Oscar would not be in a hurry to open out his business. He would want to make sure, and I suspect that would take time. Unless the detective hurries him along it will take several days at least for him to make up his mind. I may be mistaken about him. I was only a child when I had the opportunity to study what little character he has, but I think I read him well. Until he has made up his mind in regard to Adam we are in no pressing danger. After that there will be little time left us. When he begins work he knows how to push it along."

"And allowing all the latitude you desire, and only answering the question if it seems good, in case this Oscar Hurd has any other object in view beyond making Appleby aware of the fact that there is a million waiting for him further back, what might it be? How could he harm you? Leaving out of account the fact that he might be as willing to shoot as you have shown yourself to be, what would he do?"

"Confound it, Chet! you know I am not precisely an angel, and ought to be able to guess that my past life has not been altogether blameless. With such an unfortunate record it would not be hard to trump up something to make me trouble. There is no way to get around the snares he lays, and once the noose is sprung it is hard to break the cord. You can be sure he will have some trumped-up charge ready, a charge of course which it will be hard if not impossible to disprove, and when he takes me back to answer to that I am as good as lost. Of course, I do not intend to go, but I may as well make it clear to your eyes that he is a man to be hated as well as feared."

"I believe you, my dear; and I think I understand. I suspect this discarded husband of yours is as much a detective as is Dan Garland. If you have given us nothing else new in regard to the men, you have at least let us know what they are like, and what it is you fear. I would a great deal rather know there was some tangible reason for the course you are pursuing than that it was simply from a blind hatred. I thought at first you might have made a mistake in attacking a man who had so far shown no intention of troubling us, but I believe now you are right. With so much at stake it will not do to take any chances. The only thing I would insist on is, that beyond Benham and myself no one shall know who is at the bottom of the campaign against the stranger. Irving may be a good man, and so may others of the boys, but there is no use to trust any of them with such a secret as long as it can be avoided. What has been done was all well enough in its way, on the first flush of the moment, but I will take charge from this time on, and I think I can assure you there will be nothing in its conclusion to which you will be able to object."

"Don't be too confident, Chet. I know there are few men living who can get away with you; but Oscar Hurd is about as good as the best, and has as little mercy as any. If I could keep you in the background from start to finish I would like it all the better. To get these two out of the road is but the beginning. After that comes the play for the million, and though, to me, it all seems to be plain sailing, there will be some work about it that will need a fine hand, such as you have, to carry it through. Indeed, if I did not count on having you behind me I would not try it at all. If they can do it better, let the saints down him, and not have our hands appear at all; or if any one is to show up at the front it would be better that it should be I."

"Thanks, little woman, but I am going to take peculiar and especial care of the gentleman. He is my meat, and when I get through with him you are welcome to consider the question of who is the better man. If you were less afraid of him I might not be so determined on taking hold of him myself."

"I verily believe the man is jealous!" exclaimed the doctor, and it was plain the idea was not altogether unpleasant to her.

"Rest easy! If I ever cared for Oscar Hurd all the love I fancied I had for him turned into bitter, burning hate, so long ago that everything else seems like a dream. And it is just because I do care so much for you that I do not wish to see you two pitted against each other. I would have no doubts about the result in the long run, in spite of the advantages he would hold; but in anything like the open fight you have hinted you were going to try to make, he would have the chance to make his teeth meet and leave a scar, if nothing more. And there are few men who have luck more at their fingers' ends than he. To serve his own ends he may be linked in with the law, but he is none the less desperate and dangerous. Beware of him."

"Not half bad advice," interrupted Benham, as D'Aubegne was about to speak.

"There is even a wrinkle or two about it which seems to fit your humble servant, though it comes a shade late. A nice sort of individual it was I was set to bucking against, and if I had gone further forward, after the fashion I generally observe, I might not have got off as well as poor Paddy. I believe there was a hint that he was a desperate sort of a fighter, but it was not given in a very impressive shape."

"Don't feel hurt about that. I had hardly taken time to consider all this. I only knew I wanted him out of the way, and quickly. But what is the matter overhead?"

Down from the Living Light Saloon there came a noise to which the one in the early evening was but a trifle, and D'Aubegne seemed to scent danger in the air.

"There is more than rough fun there. Come on, Tom. We must find out what is the trouble," he said.

CHAPTER X.

UNCLE EZRA TRIES AN OLD PARD.

UNCLE EZRA could not by any possibility have struck a man more ready to show him around, nor could he have well found one who had more respect for the prowess which might be concealed beneath the ragged coat of the seeming tramp. The new-comer was Jim Turner.

Turner had looked around after coming to his senses, but failed to find any traces of the man who he was sure had in some way got the better of him. The question he was most anxious to have solved was, how the thing had been done. He was an adept in such games himself, but this beat his time, two to one, and he could understand why it was Double-Cinch Dan was so feared by evil-doers. When he did strike, it was next thing to impossible to see how the blow was given.

He had given up his quest for some time, and after wandering aimlessly among the saloons, was barking back to the Living Light, when he was addressed by the last man he expected to see.

He halted at once, and listened to the trampish-looking fellow with a respect that a few hours before he would never have thought of showing, though at the same time he did his best to maintain a quizzical demeanor, such as was more appropriate to the outward appearance of the man who addressed him.

"Glad to meet you, old man, and happy to do what I can for the stranger within the gates. But, I must say, for a chief you look remarkably far down at the heel. You might fish up enough for a reasonable sized ante, but I am afraid about the time our poker kings began to raise on you there would be a jump of the game, or a call for a sight for your money. And that style is away below par in Sunrise."

"Reckon now, ef you could 'most always sometimes judge by looks you wouldn't be so far wrong," replied Uncle Ezra, taking a glance at himself as well as he could in the light which came from the neighboring windows.

"But 'pearances are d'ceptiv', an' ef I give yer my hull boodle ter hold, it would be too heavy fur you ter run erway with. Ef that don't strike yer ez ther truth, kin 'xplain still furder."

"Furder goes, old man. If I led in such an anamile, when they fired you out, they might take the notion to bounce me."

"Well, then, it's money talks, an' clothes ain't no objeck. I kin show a pile thet it are wu' ther winnin', an' I never kick ef I lose. Ain't that good ernuf?"

"Might be better, though. If I were in your place, and had unlimited wealth, it strikes me I would try the new barber's shop, and then call on Old Solomon, and see what he could do toward setting me up with a new suit. Do that, and I might be willing to point out the biggest poker chief who ever drew breath this side of the Rockies. But you can't have the earth unless you give security you know how to take care of it. So-long!"

Turner made as if he intended to pass on, though that was the furthest thing from his intentions.

"Jest a minnit, hole on! I didn't ax yer ter take any 'sponsability, but o'ny ter p'int out whar ter find ther kind ov cattle I'm a-lookin' fur. I'm on ther war-path ter-night, big ez a'bar, an' I'm heeled fur biz plum ter ther rattles. Jest lis'sen to 'em chink."

From a pocket in his pantaloons he drew out a handful of coins, letting them slide from one hand into the other and then back again with a musical jingle.

"Yaller boys, every mother's son ov 'em; an' ther's a wad ov greenbacks ter back 'em. Say, I ain't half ez hard ez I look."

"Well—I'll be cursed—"

Jim was not more than half as much astonished as he let on, but he acted his part to nature.

"Dun'no ez I ort ter let on, but, seein' it's you, I don't mind. I'm a sorter millionaire in d'sguise, an' I come ter Sunrise ter see 'bout locatin' a air-line railroad frum hyer ter Noo Yo'k. My pards ain't hyer yit, an' wile I'm a-waitin' fur 'em I got ter do s'uthin' ter fill in ther time."

"You don't say so! And so?"

"I got ter either gamble er git drunk—an' I don't keer much w'ich. It's ther way we caper-talists hev. W'en we ain't makin' coin we're a-spendin' it, 'cept w'en we're asleep. An' then—sich dreams—oh, my! What d' yer say ter a hack around town, anyhow, an' let ther keerds keep till ther fun are over? I kinder liked you fu'st sight, an' blame me ef I don't bergin ter love yer like a brother."

"Many thanks, but I am afraid that I haven't the wealth to float alongside of such a highflyer as you. Still, there is the Living Light, right at your elbow. You couldn't find better tipple if you were to look all over the town; and if it is a game you want, there will be men there who know the cards by name, and would play with Lazarus himself if he had stake enough to make it worth their while."

"Yer couldn't menshun no names, I reckon?"

"Lots of them. There is Chet D'Aubegne, the very highest roller of them all, drops in now and then of an evening. Tom Benham holds as stiff hands as you will want to see. Nip Allison, the boss of the house, keeps his end up when he gets down to the table. Oh, there is a host gathered in the Living Light when the saints are all assembled—and, old man, if I were you I don't believe that I would go in there, not in that rig, anyhow. They will murder you, ten chances to one, and they will clean you out without a doubt. You are not the style for the occasion."

"Style nothin'! I'm a good man on w'eels, an' sooner than starve I guess I'll go in. Many thanks, stranger, an' don't worry. Onkle Ezry kin take keer ov hisself."

"Hold on, then, if you are bound to go, I may as well steer you in, and give you a few hints as to the sort of men you find there. The fact is, I was a tramp once myself, for a short time, and I have a sort of kindly feeling for the breed. Just follow on in my rear a little—and if you should hear me say scat, you had better jump without looking. If you don't you will find there is danger in the air."

Then Turner moved away, as he did so giving a chuckle loud enough to be heard by the man at his back. It sounded as though there was a good deal of amusement to be got out of the idea of Uncle Ezra presenting himself before the patrons of the Living Light.

"With yer I am, pard. I kin feel fur yer dignity, an' don't git r'iled 'cause yer don't cotton right down. Man ov 'sperunce an' caushun, you be, an' them's ther kind I like ter know. I'm comin' clost behind yer."

And it was in this way that Jim Turner steered into the Living Light the man he more than half thought was as dangerous to him as a mad dog, and whom he would have slaughtered with as little remorse if the proper occasion had presented itself.

Once inside of the saloon Ezra halted and stared around, blear-eyed and blinking.

He did not cut a very presentable figure.

It was not so much the symptoms of poverty as the story written on his face. Adam Appleby had appeared more destitute—but a million times more deserving.

Unfortunately for Uncle Ezra, he was not altogether a stranger in the town, though his stay there had been short. He had opened out his campaign the night before by appearing in one or two of the lower saloons, where he made no lavish display of money, though he managed to be always drinking. There were two or three in the room who recognized him at once.

Nip Allison was one. He always kept a keen eye open to see who came in, and he noticed the tramp on his entrance. Having nothing else to occupy his attention he strode that way.

"See here, old man, you are not the kind we want at the Living Light, and we don't want to have any fuss about it, either. Johnny, over there will give you a drink, and then you steer your bark for other havens. There's the Slap Bang, about ten doors down the street, where they make fellows of your stripe welcome. If you want solid advice I should say, Git thar Eli!"

While Nip was speaking Turner was striving to catch his eye; but without success.

It was just as well. Perhaps. Uncle Ezra was always able to speak for himself, and was seldom slow about doing it, either. He listened with a comical air of attention, his mouth hanging down, and his eyes wide open, until Nip had concluded. Then the same handful of coin came out that Turner had heard jingle.

"Spoken like a man an' a brother," he mumbled, while allowing the gold pieces to slide slowly from one hand to the other.

"Ef I war axed whar on ther wide yearth a feller could hope ter look fur a squar'man, allers willin' ter 'levyate deestress, and help a pore pilgrim w'ot war down ter his uppers over ther stony places in ther road, I'd say, at ther Livin' Light, an' ther fu'st letter ov his name war Nip Allison. But, Nippy, ole frien', I ain't one ov that kind. I ain't no longer ez I used ter wos, an' ez no doubt, you remember me. I struck 'ile sence then, an' I flip the pasteboards with ther biggest big-bugs in the puddle. Don't say ther yer hev furgot yer Onkle Ezry; it would be too distressin'."

"Sorry to hurt your feelings, old man; but I never remember a man with as ragged a coat as that you are sporting. If you have the means to rustle around the Light, and want to do it, you had better go out and pick up a garment that has fewer holes, and less mud on it. I never saw you before last night, and you know it. Of course, that is the same old story, however. You picked it up before you had been a year on the tramp, and you couldn't let up on it if you tried. We must draw a line somewhere, and we draw at such as you, even if you have a pocket full of yellow boys. Your room is better than your fortune. Get along with you before the trouble begins. See?"

"But, pard, ye'r 'way off, actooally you are. Five year ago—mebbe ten, time slips 'round so that it's hard ter keep ther run ov it—you an' me war thick ez thieves. W'y, didn't I hold ther box, night in, an' night out, in jest ther jim-dandiest s'lloon that war ever opened in ther rustlin' ole burg ov Side Ace? An' did I ever spring ther keyards ther wrong way, er let ther bank in with a sanded deck, sich ez many a dealer in them days war in ther habit ov doin'; an' didn't I stan' by yer when that room jst swum in gore? Oh, ef I hed known it sooner me arms would bin a-reachin' ter gether in ther aushest boss ov Side Ace afore I hed b'isted a drink in Sunshine. An' he sez he don't recomember!"

Ezra wound up with a wail that would have touched the heart of a stone—if stones had hearts that could hear.

Allison was more puzzled than moved.

After more than one effort Turner had at last attracted his attention and made a sign full of meaning to the proprietor. It said, give him a chance—there are reasons for it.

But though the sign had caused the man to receive a hearing, after he had made his little speech, Allison was well enough satisfied that he had heard it. He remembered the old days in Side Ace, and there was something familiar about this ragged old pretender, but for the life of him he could not place him. He might be a fraud; but at the same time Nip was pretty certain he had considerable knowledge that was not to be picked up in Sunrise. No man there had ever heard him speak of the town to which Ezra alluded, and he had hoped that the times there, and the name under which he then floated, had all been forgotten. He was not sure whether he was glad or sorry to have met one who could recall to his mind the things he had tried to bury out of his recollection years ago.

He glanced warily around.

He had not been at all careful to modulate his voice to a tone adapted to keeping the conversation private; but Ezra had been.

No one else had heard the name of Side Ace, though by this time a number of curious spectators were watching from some little distance how things were going. Nip had sometimes a hurricane way of doing business, and any spectators not personally interested gave him room according to his size.

"You really must excuse my want of memory," he coldly responded, moving back a pace from the outstretched hand feeling for his.

"Considering I was never in Side Ace, and ten years ago was three thousand miles away, it is not altogether singular I do not recognize you, so, save your gush for the men with whom it will win. But for the sake of an old timer I'll let up a little on you as long as you don't try to spread over too much land. Take a seat in the corner, yonder, and if you try to make more noise than the law allows, out you go, if you were the ghost of General Jackson."

CHAPTER XI.

LIMBER LUKE, OF SIDE ACE.

"Ef that's ther best yer kin do, reckon I'd better take that drink, an' glide on to ther Slap Bang. An' me a-thinkin' that with all this hyer boodle mebbe Nip would be wantin' ter take a pardner 'bout ez big ez my size, an' jest so han'-sum. Han' me some chuck out at ther back door, an' I'll go a-trampin'. Sich a onregenerate, missanctified cuss ez I be can't look ter hev a frien' in Sunshine. Say, Nip, fur ther sake ov ole times, spread me a lay-out an' let me hev one whack at 'em ez I used ter hev! It sba'n't cost yer a cent ef ther bank loses, an' ef it wins ye'r in on ther ground floor. An' ef that's too good ter hope fur, sit down acrost ther table an' let me feel yer strength at draw ag'in. I'm dirty, but I'm good ter tie to."

"Better to smell, I should say. The undiluted forty-rod you have been pouring in for the last forty years is beginning to get in its work, and I should say you are not long for the land of the living. I can't well refuse the request of a dying man, and I begin to be a little curious to know how much of a fraud you really are. Herel Go borrow a coat from Johnny, wash your face and comb your hair, and confound me, if I don't give you a chance to see what you can do with a square box and an honest deck!"

"Put her thar, pard, put her thar!" exclaimed Ezra, striking the palm of one dirty hand into that of its mate.

"Ther man ez sez prosperity hez sp'iled Nip

Double-Cinch Dan.

Allison kin bear my 'pinyun ov whar he'll die w'en he goes to, 'bout hevin' ter wait more ner a minnit. I'm with yer in a holy second."

And with every manifestation of extreme delight the tramp moved off in the direction of the bartender pointed out as Johnny.

Nip's eyes followed him as he went with a strange expression in their depths. If he had seen death in the way of the man, he would hardly have called him back. Yet he nodded when Johnny looked in his direction, and smiled when he saw that Uncle Ezra proposed to follow the lines marked out for him.

"Reckon he don't know how near he was to feeling the club Johnny was reaching for under the bar. And I suppose it wouldn't bother him a bit if he did. It may make no end of trouble, but Turner wouldn't ask to let him have his swing if there was no reason for it. We will see, later on."

It was pretty certain that Johnny was for a moment undecided whether to believe the evidence of his own senses after he had heard the very modest request of the fellow in front of him. He looked again at Nip, and when he caught another nod dropped the end of his cudgel.

"Well, I'll be blamed! What next? Here, Ned, look after things a moment; I have business with this gentleman in the back room. Come along with me, old pudgy, and I'll fix you up so that your mother wouldn't know you if she could see you, and your friends—if you got any—will think you are another man."

Ned, the junior bartender, looked on in amazement, but said nothing. It was the rule of the house to ask no questions, each man shoudering the responsibility of his own actions. Only he shook his head as the two vanished, and wondered what Mr. Allison would say to the queer pard Johnny had picked up.

The two were gone but a brief time. When they returned the prophecy uttered by Johnny was almost verified.

Almost; but not quite.

If there had been any deceit about that face, which still shone like a beacon fire, Johnny certainly should have been in a condition to know, for he saw soap and water applied to it, vigorously and without stint.

The result was, the face grew cleaner, but also redder; the nose was a trifle more bulbous; the eyes not a whit clearer.

But the costume! Uncle Ezra was clad from head to foot in solemn black, save where it was relieved by a touch of white.

It was a suit in which Johnny had not seen fit to air himself since he had found his way to Sunrise, and therefore the more appropriate for the occasion. Johnny had girth, after the manner of his class, and though there was a little stretching, the fit did not seem so bad. With a smirk on his face, and a gait that had acquired considerable firmness since he first entered the saloon, Ezra came forward, while Johnny halted at the door and watched him as he went.

"Can't say that I feel perzactly at home in 'em; but hope I suit you better," he said, as he halted in front of Nip.

"Now set me ter work, an' see ef I ain't ez good a man ez I used ter was. An' I don't ask fur ary more bocze. I've hed my whirl, enj'yed it clean up to ther nines, an' now it's bizziness with a big B that I'm lookin' fur. Bizziness an' fun, them's Onkle Ezry's watchwords all ther world over."

"Business she are," replied Nip; and then turning to the crowd:

"My new dealer, gentlemen. He is going to spread his little lay-out, and deal you a fair game without a flyer."

"Hole on! Hole on!"

The speech did not exactly suit Ezra's ideas of the way things should be done.

"Tell ther truth ef it shames ther devil. I kin deal a fair game, an' I kin deal one 'thout a limit. But ther two don't run tergether. Fifty dollars are no end ov a big thing when it comes on the turn ov a keyard, an' if ary man hyer ain't satisfied with that I'll be happy ter stan' at ther other side ov ther table, an' let him pull fur all he's w'u'th. Er I kin deal a game ter win, an' raise ther flyer; but I won't swear ter not springin' ther pasteboards on ther turn, er otherwise usin' sich advantages ez ther size ov ther pot kinder indercates."

The frankness with which he made his statements was well received. The limit was fifty per cent. lower than that usually named in the house; but for a new beginner it was liberal enough, and when Ezra seated himself behind the lay-out, with a fresh pack of cards in his fist, there were plenty of sports ready to try their luck with the new dealer.

Allison watched the man with a growing interest.

He still failed to trace anything familiar in the face that was from time to time turned toward him, yet there was a suggestiveness about him as he dropped into his chair that recalled something—he could not say what. He was not sure, but there was a flavor of Side Ace about it, after all.

Ezra tore off the wrapper from the deck, and spread the cards out slightly with a deft motion of his thumb. Then he caught the greater por-

tion of them in his right hand, and holding them a foot or so above his left, dropped them down, one at a time, with a peculiar, wavy motion, that sent every bit of pasteboard to its allotted place without a single balk. Over and under, under and over the portion in his left hand they dropped, and all the time Ezra never looked at the cards, but was watching Nip, with the grin on his face still more pronounced.

"By the living lightning!" exclaimed Nip, for once in his life thoroughly and completely surprised.

"It's Limber Luke, turned into an elephant, or my mother's only son is a Dutchman!"

Ezra caught the words, nodded approval, laid down the cards to be cut, and when that operation had been performed to the satisfaction of the players, placed the deck in the box, and was ready for business.

And just then, pushing eagerly through the crowd until he had secured a place at the table, came the mendicant musician, Adam Appleby.

"If you please, ten dollars worth of chips. It is not often I indulge, but I feel it in my soul that this is my night on."

Up to this time Nip had permitted things to drift along without taking any further part in the game than the simple announcement he had made. It looked as though he was going to allow Ezra to keep his own cues, and attend to the financial portion of the game as well as the dealing.

But from the moment of his sudden recognition all that was changed.

From the specimen way in which he handled the cards, it was evident he had lost none of the old time deftness which Allison so well remembered, and wreck though he might be in appearance, Nip felt very sure he would be found better than he looked.

Without saying anything to give a hint to the crowd how things had been worked, he made a few dispositions; a cue-keeper and lookout turned up; there was a man with coin and checks; almost before he could know it, the tramp found himself in good and regular standing, and on the high-road to fortune.

Nip Allison was notoriously liberal with his employees.

So much interested in other things had the proprietor been, that he failed to note Adam Appleby's application until his money was invested and a chip or two on the table.

At sight of that he drew a long breath, and uttered something like a whistle; but made no interference, narrowly though he watched his proceedings from that time on.

"With fifty for a limit, and the boys betting all around the table, he can't throw away a fortune, even if the two are in cahoots, but it looks a little odd. And to come back at me with the money that was given him in the house, will either bring him the biggest kind of luck, or bu'st him wide open. Anyhow, the pair will bear watching, though I always found Limber Luke as square as a die, and I was only too sorry when I found I couldn't keep him."

"I said I thought it was my night on, and I was right. Oh, I knew that fortune would tire of chasing me. When I win on the first turn what can I look for but to leave off where the bank began? Look you, gentlemen all, the king is on my side; what can I expect but a long run of good fortune?"

Sure enough, his first venture had proved a winning one; and now, after this jubilation, which was more after the manner of a soliloquy than an address, in spite of its wording, he doubled his bet on the king, and then watched the pudgy fingers of the dealer with eager eyes.

It did not seem as though he intended to press the bank very hard, yet Nip frowned, and Uncle Ezra looked up with a certain amount of uneasiness on his features.

"Can't yer buy him off? 'Pon me soul I b'lieve he's goin' ter hoodoo my luck."

"Hoodoo, nothing! You just go on with your deal and see that you pull them straight. The old coon ought not to have got into the game, but now that he is there he may as well stay till something goes burst. I'll look out to see that there is no shenanigan; and if there is a run of luck against it, I guess the bank can stand it for one night only. After that it may be cheaper to get a new dealer. Hold your own if you can. If you can't, get a move on when the game closes."

All this time Turner was watching and saying nothing. At first he thought Allison was giving the old man a show on account of his signal; but when the change of costume had been made—though it was nothing more than he had suggested outside—and the bank had opened, he began to think things had gone too far not to have something not understood by him behind them.

"Heavens, Nip! Have you any idea who that wreck really is?" was his question, carefully asked, as he sidled up after the last speech of the proprietor.

"Right you are, or he never would be standing behind the box without a better recommendation than you have given him, so rest easy in your soul. If hard life and unlimited whisky have not broken him all up—and I don't think they have, hard as he looks—he can give a better

account of himself than nine men out of ten who want to get there."

"And you are sure—very sure?"

"Sure of nothing except that, bar straight flushes, four aces are a sure thing to bet on."

"In a straight deal, yes."

"And the man who can hold out with me, or deal from the bottom, is welcome to all the advantage he can make out of the operations. I never saw but one man who can or did handle the cards in exactly the way he does, and he has told me enough besides that he makes me pretty sure he is a sport I tied to once, and found him all there. Limber Luke was the handle he sailed under in those days, and no matter how he has changed in looks, I'm willing to risk my money that he is the same jini-dandy he then was."

"Whew! That takes my breath clear away! And I spotting him for something else, and Spider Billy running his legs off to keep him in view! Won't Tom swear when he finds out the sell?"

"Perhaps, perhaps! But who did you think he was? A good many years went by since the time I have been talking of, and he might have had a dozen names since then."

"So he might, but it's not likely he carried this one. Benham had an idea Dan Garland came down here on business; and that this is the man."

"And Benham is a dog-goned fool! But—what's the racket now?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE KITTEN SHOWS HER CLAWS.

A FEW moments after Adam Appleby had taken his place at the gaming-table, a queer-looking little figure hurried around the corner, and came straight for the doorway of the Living Light.

The figure belonged to the Kitten. She had on the same mile-too-big dress that had amused Jaimeson a few hours before, though she had made some changes by the help of half a dozen pins and a string or two. Before setting out, she had a fair idea of where her quest would lead her, and took the time to dispose of her train after the simplest fashion.

When she woke up and found her grandfather not in the cabin, past experience told her where to look for him. His temptation to drink had gone by; but there was a stronger one yet to be overcome.

It was no particular fault of Adam Appleby that he had not mentioned it to his visitor when admitting the bold the appetite for strong drink had upon him. He did not recognize it himself, though, with money in his pocket, and the opportunity at hand, he was a born gambler, who, once started, never knew how to leave off until the last cent was gone.

For, of course, Adam was unlucky; and when he was not particularly unlucky, he fell into the hands of men to whom that made no particular difference. Time and again had he been fleeced; and time and again, when he had secured a little capital, had he returned to the hopeless task of conquering fortune at the turn of the cards.

And Kitty had wasted no time in searching. She understood the old man would go direct to the spot where he had made his present stake, with the idea that his luck would be better there than anywhere else.

Once near the door, however, and her steps began to loiter. She could see from a glance at the windows, that the place was well filled, and knew what sort of a crowd was generally to be found at the Light. She had been lingering on the outside while Adam made his effort earlier in the evening, and the riot and racket she then heard and saw was a warning as to what she might expect to be going on there at a moment's notice.

While she hesitated, she heard a light, free step, almost at her side, and then a jovial-sounding voice:

"What's the matter now, little one? Hope you don't think you have business in there. It is a hard enough looking hole for a man to go into, and I don't know that I would want to risk it unless I had to."

The address was a surprise. The Kitten turned with a start.

"There are crackers and cold meat enough for breakfast, but if I don't get him before he loses all his change, there will be nothing in the cupboard for dinner, and by supper-time we will be starving again. I'm little, but I have a monstrous big appetite, and I know how it goes."

"And pray, my dear, who is 'he'? If it is any one I can readily pick out, I wouldn't mind looking him up for you, sooner than see you go in there."

"Grandpa, of course. He lives with me and tries to keep the table going; but between being sick half the time, and his card-playing, and—and—a fault or two besides, it is sometimes pretty hard to make both ends meet. I don't know where we would be if I didn't do a little hustling myself. I don't think he would come for you, though I am much obliged, all the same, for your offer. I don't think they will hurt me in there; and if I call him he can hard-

ly refuse to come. I know he would not care to have me waiting for him in such a place; and unless he comes out I shall stay in. So, there, now!"

"Quite a proper spirit, though that is not the way the world generally looks at such things. If you are in a hurry about it, I might be willing to wait outside until you catch him, and see that nothing goes wrong. While I am here nothing shall harm you if I can reach far enough and quick enough to hinder."

"Thank you. You may stay if you want to, but the Kitten can generally take care of herself. You see, the less friends I had about the more I would be apt to pick up in there. So long. You needn't wait. I don't know that there is any use of your seeing me later."

Without waiting for an answer she moved away; and now she showed no more hesitation, but stepped resolutely through the open door.

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and half-turned, as though about to walk away.

Then, he reconsidered his intentions, and followed on, directly in her wake.

Kitty was small and nimble. Before her chance friend was at the door she was half-way across the bar-room, threading her way in and out, and around the knots of men who occupied the floor. If Adam had reached the gaming tables of the Living Light he was not to be found here, but in the room beyond, the location of which she knew by instinct.

All would have gone well enough, perhaps, if, in attempting to avoid three or four men, who came walking across her path, she had not run right into the arms of an individual who as suddenly came from the other side.

"Hello! What's this I see before me? A leetle, female bud what's one-day goin' to blossom out inter a woman. An' not half-bad lookin' are she goin' ter be. It's a blessin' that I'll be in ther tomb afore she gits age an' experien's, er she might break me heart accordin' to ther fashion ov ther sect. One kiss, leetle one, an' then run along home. It's not the place for such lam's as you be."

The speaker was a giant of a man, rather roughly clad, though not so much so as to seem out of place in the Living Light. He had a face not altogether evil, and there was considerable of good humor in his boisterous tones. Perhaps if he had made his address in a different fashion he might not have so angered the Kitten.

But when she ran against him, in her haste, he caught her by the shoulders, swung her clear of the floor, and up until her face was on a level with his own. There he held her, looking at her with eyes in which she could see the evil that the rest of the world would hardly have noticed.

She never winced under the treatment that was less gentle than the man knew, but when he drew her face toward his she struck at him with her open palm, a quick, spiteful stroke, which he had no time to dodge or guard against.

The resulting smack was loud enough to be heard several yards in spite of the noise of many voices and trampling feet. He staggered back with a growl, lowering her slightly, though not releasing his hold. There was a loud laugh near by which angered him more than the blow, yet it was on the girl he was ready to wreak his vengeance.

"You little hussy, you! Wuss ner a cat, an' not more than half as han'sum'. I'll show you how to use your claws. Before I get done with you ther'll be a chance for you to learn how you like smackin' yerself."

He shook her roughly as he spoke, and then, still keeping her in the air by his gripe on the one shoulder, he raised his other hand for the purpose of giving her a blow.

There was no chance for Kitty to try her paw again, since he held her almost at arm's length. She did not even attempt to struggle out of his grasp, but remained quiet, staring steadily in his face. If he had once caught that look it is doubtful if he would have been cur enough to strike.

But, he was too angry to note it, and his hand would have fallen, quick and heavy, had it not been for an interruption.

"If you please, my festive friend, will you kindly drop that young lady, and turn your attention to me? I have no doubt the necessity to strike is strong on you, and if so I think I can furnish you a fairer, because a larger mark. And then, there would not be quite the disgrace there is in hitting a little girl—even if she is about the kind you consider to be fairly your game."

A set of fingers, possessed of a gripe of steel, was on his shoulder, and if he neither turned nor shook them off it was because they held him just as he was standing, and by their steady pressure compelled him to open his fingers and allow the child to drop to the floor.

Without waiting to thank her rescuer, or see how he fared, Kitty dodged through the crowd, and made her way into the other room, where a smaller but deeply interested crowd was hanging around the table at which Uncle Ezra was dealing faro.

It was just as well the Kitten made her escape while there was time. A minute later and she might have been crushed in the crowd,

for toward the spot she had just left there was an almost instantaneous rush.

The giant turned his attention to the young man, with a vengeance. With the fingers still almost meeting in the flesh, he wheeled, and struck out with his free hand.

It was no great wonder the blow failed to connect, since it was the easiest thing in the world for the person at whom the stroke was aimed to wheel with him.

Then, as the blow wasted itself on the air, the giant felt himself grasped quickly below the knees, the head at which he had been staring dropping out of sight.

What was coming he understood, and strove to fight against, but without avail. He was too slow in the motions. Up into the air the champion went, over the head of the stranger sport, striking the floor on the back of his neck and shoulders, after turning a complete somerset.

CHAPTER XIII.

SACRAMENTO SAM TALKS SPORT.

WHEN the heels of the giant flew over they cracked a couple more on the head, so that there was more execution done than the young man had looked for, though the fact did not trouble him a bit.

"Easy, friends!" he said, raising his right hand with the palm out.

"I don't think his neck is broken, and if it is not he looks like the sort of a fellow to be around again before many minutes, and giving you more fun than you can shake a stick at. Don't disappoint him—and do not crowd me. It has been so long since I had any pure, undiluted fun, this chance seems quite providential. I am not large, but the pressure of steam I can put to the square inch when I have the blowers on, is certainly amazing. What did you say was the name of our large friend on the floor? I didn't distinctly catch it, and would feel bad if I did not know how to call him when he begins to renew the acquaintance."

What he said, he uttered in such a careless, sportive way that it gave no offense of itself, especially as it was not hard to believe there was more truth than bluff in his words after the way he had handled the big man who was slowly rising from the floor, feeling of his neck as though he was uncertain whether it was in the right place or not.

"Mind your eye, stranger; Big Bert is after you, and if you don't look sharp and jump spry he'll break your neck, sure."

So shouted a voice from the crowd, and it seemed as though the opinion was coincided with by nearly every one there. Those who had pressed in between the two hastily got out of the way, and every one else fell back a little.

To the surprise of the crowd Big Bert made no such rush as was expected.

He first drew a long breath when he found that no bones were broken, and then addressed the stranger as calmly as if there could be no bad blood between them.

"Ye'r' a trump, youngster, an' Big Bert says it. Ef I bed bin in your place I'd 'a' done the same thing, an' I don't feel no bad blood a-risin'. You got a grip on yer like a vice an' kin handle yerself up to nature. I ain't quite sure but what you're ther better man. An' that's what makes me a little r'iled. Just a leetle, you understands. If I could be sure about it, now, I wouldn't kick, if you hed broke my back clean in two. What do you say, stranger? Take it your own way, but for the love of mercy try me one fall, to make it sure that was not all a mistake. After that, win or lose, I won't have a word to say."

"Rather a horse to a hen sort of affair that would be, don't you think?" responded the other, with a quiet chuckle at the worn-out smile.

"If you should happen to fall on me you would squash me flatter than a pancake; and, you know, weight will tell."

"I know they say so; but there's something that beats weight every time. I never found it yet, but somehow I begin ter suspect you have it. I don't want to crowd your game, but I won't die happy unless I get at the truth, right now."

"Oh, well, if it is going to be such a mighty accommodation it won't do for me to be selfish. Catch hold, and we'll see whose heels go into the air this time."

To the surprise of all the stranger accepted the offer without a protest or a fear. With his hands held in front of him, and low down, he stepped forward, Big Bert did the same, and then the two men threw themselves at each other like lightning, each striving for the under hold.

For a man of his size Bert was quick as a flash; but he had to do with a man who was quicker. He thought he had it, and began a howl of triumph, but before his grip could tighten he felt the arms of the stranger under his own.

Even then, with that advantage, there was no delay until Bert was lifted clean from the floor.

"Now I have you where you want to be just tell me where you would soonest drop. I don't know much about the floor hereabouts, and there may be some spot softer than another. I'm

always anxious for everybody to have their own way."

Big Bert gave no answer. Although his heels were in the air he had not altogether given up the fight. If he could get his hands a little lower down he had hopes of still bending in the back, the stiffness of which he had not yet even had a chance to try.

He made one desperate effort for a better hold, as he felt himself being borne along, and then—there was something little short of an earthquake. Down came both men with a crash. Fair play was not in vogue at the Living Light, and some one had taken the opportunity to kick the heels of the stranger from under him, bringing the two to the ground in a mixed heap.

Then there was a roaring rush as a dozen men nearly crushed them, some wanting to see how the thing was, and the rest anxious to take a hand in before it was too late.

For a little while confusion was worse confounded.

Then there was a sudden upheaval, men flew this way and that, and Big Bert and the stranger sprung to their feet, unhurt so far, but Bert howling mad as he faced the lot.

"Who done it? Only show me who done it, an' ef I don't break his back afore ther night's over, my name ain't Big Bert Barton! Ten dollars will I give ter know who knocked ther heels from under him, jest when I war playin' hardest fur ther advantage. An' ez fur you galoots that wanted ter take a hand in, mebbe you'd like ter pile on now? He's a good little man, I'm a good big one; an' betwixt us, we two kin clean ther house. Hyer, stranger, shake! Fur yer weight an' inches ther's not a better man standin' on shoe-leather. I found out all I wanted ter know, an' ef that gang ain't satisfied, you an' me kin fill their stomjacks so full they won't want ary more supper fur a year."

As he spoke he thrust out his paw; and there was little doubt the offer was made in good faith.

At any rate it was accepted, though the stranger kept a lookout for anything like an attack from the others.

"Shake it is, and how will you have it? A regular pump-handle, or a squeeze for sweet love's sake?"

"Give us the squeeze first, just fur ther fun ov seein' how it feels ter be hurt. Then, you kin change it to ther pump-handle when I begins ter howl. You kin make me do that last, I feel it in me bones."

Without any perceptible effort on the part of the young man the grip on Big Bert's hand tightened. Such a pressure he had never felt before, and he had met lots of men who thought they had a good grip, and wanted to try his own. He stood it until the bones seemed about to crack, and then he shouted:

"That's ernough, let up a leetle. I don't want ter lose a paw, an' another turn ov ther screw'll about splinter a bone. An' now, seein' it are all square betwixt us, what might I call yer, stranger? Yer must hev a name somewhere; an' I'll bet a round dollar it's a good one."

"A name I have, and it's one I'm not ashamed of; but I'll leave it to you to judge whether it's a good one or not. Sacramento Sam they call me where they know me best, and sometimes add, 'the Sport with a Charm.' I carry a little thingamajig at my buttonhole, because I think it brings luck, and so far I don't know that it has ever failed me. No bad blood left between you and me, I hope, because, I reckon, this crowd would only be too happy to do us both up."

"Not a bit ov it. The man who kin down Bert Barton is good ernough ter be his best friend. Ef you're a drinkin' man, come up to the bar with me, and imbibe. An' ef you're not, I'll do the drinkin', an' you kin smell ov ther glass while I swaller fur both. Tbar's nothin' mean about me."

"Or me, either. Lead the way."

"See here, what has been going on here?" interposed Nip Allison, advancing from the other room as the two were about to move away.

"I have had one riot in the house this evenin' that I thought was going to take the roof off, and a bit ago it sounded as though there was going to be a worse one. Go a little slow, you gents that look as though you were aching to buckle to with a stranger. If there is any more of it I'll take a hand in, and you know what that means."

The interruption came just in time, for the men who had been included in the general growl of Big Bert were moving toward him, although he did not appear to notice the fact. He had talked pretty freely, and what he said was not liked.

The caution stopped further trouble, for it was given after the style of a man thoroughly in earnest. When Nip talked that way he did something before long if his words were not speedily heeded.

"Take it easy, Nip. There's bin no bones broke," said Bert, who had halted at the address.

"Sacramento Sam, my friend hyer, an' I war havin' a leetle fun, all to our two selves alone, an' some ov ther rest wanted a sheer. That's over, now, an' we're off fur the bar. Ther rest

ov yer bed better come to. No use ter keep spite, though, ef I could find ther dirty, mean galoot ez let us down on the run, I'd break his ugly head wide open."

Allison nodded to the introduction, listened to the meager explanation, and paid no attention to the threat with which the speaker closed. He dropped in by Bert's side at the same time that quite a procession formed in his rear, and the whole outfit drifted to the bar.

"A stranger to the town, of course," he remarked, as they took places in front of Johnny and his assistants.

"Of course, though I hope not to remain so long. Sunshine seems good enough for me, and I think I will tarry for a while, and find out what will be the chances of making a living. There seems to be plenty of men here who like sport, and I am one of its prophets."

"I suppose there is always room for one more; but it's a gospel fact that there are more men here now who can claim the same tastes than the town at large cares to furnish support. It seems to pick and choose, and those who are the lucky ones don't do so badly. The rest come nigh to starving at odd times. Glad to see you go in and try it, however. If you come out jaybird, the feather in your cap will be monstrous big."

"You jest bet he'll be jaybird. The man who kin get away with Big Bert's baggage are no slouch. He'll fly too high to be a side pard ov mine, but all the same I'll be cracking my heels together when I see him win."

The giant evidently felt no soreness over his defeat; and, somehow, the original cause of the difficulty appeared to be altogether lost sight of. The interruption was not noticed by Nip, since at that moment the glasses were being filled, and when the libation to Bacchus had been duly poured he went on:

"There are plenty of games in town, but, of course, if no one but the sports patronize them some one is bound to be left. What is your particular vanity?"

"Oh, I'm an all-around sort of a player, ready to buck anything if the chances for profit seem to be large enough to justify. There is nothing like draw to begin with, but faro is not half bad fun when the limit is high, and the cards are coming your way. Then, there are lots of other things with a heap of fun in them, from chicken-fighting to mumbely-peg—I've bet money on all of them."

"And I suppose you are anxious to begin the campaign as soon as possible. Sorry to say the bank is running a little light to-night. There is a new hand at the box, and I want to be sure he won't swamp me before I give him a full swing; but if you have a fancy for a quiet little game in the back room, there is Chet D'Aubegne just coming in, and one or two more scattered about, who will help fill the table, and I will do my best to make it interesting as long as the funds last."

"The more the merrier, and I suppose the gentlemen you indicate are all high-rollers, so that when I get through with the frolic I will have the gauge of Sunshine pretty thoroughly. You couldn't please me better, and if there is nothing in the way we had better begin at once. It was a lucky chance which brought me in, and a still luckier one that steered me against my friend, Bert, here."

"Perhaps. We will know better in the morning," responded Nip, with a shrug of the shoulders, and he motioned to D'Aubegne to come his way.

"Sorry I cannot oblige you at once," answered D'Aubegne, when the introduction had been made. "I have an engagement down-town; but if you will wait an hour I think I can promise to be back, and ready for amusement."

"All right," responded the stranger sport. "I am in no great hurry, and would as soon look around and get used to the Sunshine way of business. When you get back will be time enough. Do not let me detain you."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST KITTEN.

UNCLE EZRA understood the hint of Nip Allison well enough, down to the nature of the suspicion, a tinge of which had lingered in his tones. If Adam Appleby made any great winnings there would be no further use for him at the Living Light. Yet Adam was to take away what he could win.

"Ef I don't give ther boys a square deal," was the mental reflection of Ezra, "some ov 'em'll drop to it, fur they'll all be watchin'. An' ef I do, ther ole man are bound to win. I kin feel that in me bones. Ter say nothin' ov ther fact that I don't keer ter clean him out, nobow. Letter went, though. We'll see how it works."

Fortunately there was very little trace of this to be seen in his face, and no one had more than a passing idea of the suspicion that Adam Appleby was about to hoodoo the luck of the bank, and would be a good leader to follow in the betting.

When the doubled bet on the king had won, Adam was more satisfied than ever of his being in a winning vein, and to discount the fact he began to bet on calculation rather than on luck.

Once more he doubled on the king, but placed on top of the chips the button which showed it was "coppered." When this had won for him once more he again doubled, and played it to win.

Sure as fate out came the king on his side. If there had not been half a dozen other bettors who were winning and losing with impartiality, it is probable that this opening of a streak would have attracted more attention than it did.

Fortunately, there had been quite a rush when the game opened, and all the time there were half a dozen larger bets than those of Adam Appleby's on the table. Almost every man there who was not betting was looking out for his pard, and so the little streak of Appleby went along without interruption.

Having won four times, Adam waited until the deck had run out, watching the other cards in a thoughtful way, as if trying to form a theory for the next deal.

He started out again, by once more doubling on the king, and putting five chips on the ten. If his luck kept up a little longer, his shoestring would increase to a cable of respectable dimensions.

Luck was still with him; and when he won again he shifted everything over upon the Jack, thus beginning to tread quite closely to the limit.

And while he was watching the fingers of the dealer with breathless eagerness, a little hand crept within his own, and with a gentle tug, the Kitten whispered:

"Is this the way you keep your promises, and take care of me? Come right along home before I begin to scream."

"Oh, heavens! What are you doing here, Kittie? Go home, go home! Before morning we will all be rich again if you will only keep away. You always bring me bad luck at the cards when you look at me that way."

"Bad luck, indeed! You never have any other. See! You have lost everything already. Is it not so? He is drawing in all the counters on the board."

The collapse of Adam's fortune was as sudden as its rise had been remarkable. His luck could not last forever, and if it failed him a little sooner than Uncle Ezra had anticipated, his own want of judgment had helped along the consummation. By treading a little softer he might still have been on velvet, instead of being five dollars out.

"Too bad, child! It was your fault. You distracted my attention, so that I was not looking. Fortune frowns on all such slights. I have it all to go over again."

"Indeed, you have to go home with me, and quit this nonsense. The cards all lay just so, whether you were watching them or not, and you know it. It is not your night on, whatever you may say. If you have any more chips, get the money for them and come right along before you go clean, altogether crazy."

"But, that will not do! It is throwing away the chance for the fortune we know is to come our way, some time. What better hour than this? Go away, now, while I make one more trial. If I lose, then, I promise you, I will come right away home."

"And what will I be eating to-morrow afternoon? No, thanks, grandpa! I am for holding on to the sure thing, small as it may be. Last time of asking. Are you going to get your money back, and come along; or, shall I set up a bowl? And if I do that last you will see that roof rise right off the rafters. Then the men will turn us both out, and that will be the end of it."

The child was wise in her day and generation. She had also learned a thing or two by experience. Had the means of her grandfather been more extensive, such a plan might not have worked. But with her making a racket, such as she could make on occasion, she rightly judged that Nip Allison would sooner have their room than their company.

Uncle Ezra drew a long breath when he saw the old man leave the table. For the luck of the rest he did not care a particle. He believed he could take care of it without much trouble. It was the superstitious dread of the gambler which made him nervous while the old man was at the table, even though he knew that in the long run he could win every cent he had, if his pocket book held a million.

"I'm sure I don't know what you would do if you had not me to take care of you," said the Kitten as they passed out into the street.

"You don't know whether to scold me or to cry; but, I tell you that you will feel all the better for what I have done when it comes to the supper hour to-morrow. I begin to see how things ought to go, and after this will keep a watch over you, young man. Money is too precious for us to gamble it away at the Living Light."

Adam was sulky, and answered her nothing. Had he not lost when he did it is doubtful if Kitty could have drawn him away; not, at least, without resorting to the desperate measures she had proposed. He was uncertain whether the losing turn was the finality of his streak, or whether it was sent to test his worthiness of the boon fortune was willing to bestow.

Had he not loved the child better than he did himself he might have spoken harshly to her, but he had so long believed that anything the Kitten did was right, he could not bring himself to turn upon her now.

In silence the two went some little distance together. Then, when they had come to the shadow of a shanty, the old gentleman closed his hand confidentially around that of the Kitten, and drew her down to a seat on the ground.

"Kitty, your grandpa is an old man, and if he does not know what he is talking about he ought to have some amusement in his declining years. Just think how sick I have been, and how poor we were all that time. Is it any wonder I want to see you a little better provided for?"

"Not a bit of wonder, but what is the use of wanting in this world unless you hold on to what you get? I'm proud, and I long for heaps of things; but till I get them I don't intend, if I can help it, to starve."

"Neither shall you starve. It has been a close tussle for some time, but can't you see the tide has turned, and all we need to do is a little nerve to take advantage of the streak?"

"I can see if things go as they usually do there will be no supper to-morrow, nor any breakfast the day after. They won't give you all that money twice over for hearing you play my old mouth-organ; and that young man who made the big promises, and brought us the bread and meat, will have forgotten all about you by to-morrow. And you know you wouldn't go around to hunt him up. It would look too much like begging."

"Very true, very true, if things were as they have too often been. But, can't you see the difference? We have borne our trials patiently, and now comes the time of recompense. Why else should they have loaded me up with coin to-night—five times as much as I could have hoped for—unless it was to provide enough for the occasion? Two or three dollars was not enough, you see, or they would have stopped at that. I have to lose a little at the start, and then, who knows how much would come back to me?"

"I know, grandpa. Not a cent. There is no use to argue the matter with me. For once I have caught you in time, and I mean to look after you ever so sharp, till I see that little fortune invested where it will do the most good. And I am sure the place is not in the faro bank at the Living Light. The more money you put down there, the less you will take up."

"Bless me, child! Where do you get all those slang terms? You seem to have the language of the tables at your finger ends. Certainly, you do not learn them from me."

"Never mind that. There is no sense in sitting here in the dark, talking nonsense. It is time that we were at home and in bed. If you had only stayed there, you would have had ever so many more dollars in your pocket, and we would have been all right till that mine began rolling out the pay-dirt."

"In another way you have the gambling spirit as fully developed as any of them. Don't you see that the result will be the same—though this would be the quickest. Fortune at once, or the agony over. The mine is a lottery, but you are willing to put in that the money which you will not risk on the table, where the returns come in so much the soonest. Heaven knows, I do not want to anger or grieve you, but I want you to see things as I see them. I owe you honest treatment, because you have stuck to me closer than I could have dreamed. Come, now! Be a good girl and go back to your slumbers while I woo fortune in the only way she is at present to be won. Why, if I was not on the high road to success, I could never have got into such a game as that at the Living Light."

"No use, grandpa—"

"Listen, then. If you will not believe in my judgment, give me my share to do as I choose with. See! I have a few checks yet. I did not cash them in when I left. I will give you all the rest, and, you can take it home with you, while I go back and finish the game. If I should lose, there would be nothing for me to do but come back. And if I bring a fortune, it will only be to share with you."

"And if you have a little success at first, and stay up all the night, to come crawling home without a cent, at daybreak, how much work are you going to get done! You know you don't understand when to stop. You want the earth—and you are never going to get it. Not playing faro, anyhow!"

Somehow there seemed to be a faint trace of a relenting heart in the last words of the girl, and Adam was ready to urge still harder for the blessed privilege of trying his best to throw away his money.

"Indeed, you are mistaken. It is not the earth I want, but only enough to make us feel secure until in some other way a competency comes to us. A hundred dollars, even, would be sufficient to make one feel easy!"

"Grandpa Adam, if you will stick to that I will give you your way. Let me take care of the rest and you can try your luck again with the checks you have. But you must promise me to stop if you should get a hundred dollars, and bring them home with you. If you would do

Double-Cinch Dan.

that once, I think I would know that I could trust you."

"It is a bargain, Kitten, it is a bargain! Here is my purse. Run home, now, and it will not be long before I will join you with a hundred dollars."

"And you promise me—you—you—give me your word as a gentleman?"

"I do," responded Adam, solemnly, feeling, perhaps, as though he was caught in a trap.

Then he transferred the buckskin bag which did duty as a purse to the keeping of the girl, gave a good-by and a kiss, and started back to the Living Light, where, greatly to the disgust of Uncle Ezra, he was once more to come on the carpet.

It was fully two hours later when Adam approached the shanty. He stepped along more briskly than he had done for months, and was actually whistling a tune, though careful not to let the sound rise high enough to attract any particular attention.

"Here I am, my dear!" he exclaimed as he threw open the door, and passed to the inside.

"I suppose you are waiting for me, but indeed I could not come any sooner. Once I was afraid I could not come at all, but, as I said it would be, luck was with me, and the hundred came my way at last. Tell the truth, now! Had I not better go back and make it a thousand, when the trouble there is over?"

If Kitty had known he was coming with the stipulated hundred, that was the very question she would have expected; but there was no answer.

Adam was not alarmed. The child might be keeping quiet, either for a jest, or because she was chagrined to find how poor her judgment really was. Or, she might be sleeping. He listened.

There was no sound to show a sleeper was there, and with fingers a little shaky he lit the lamp.

The blanket in which Kitty was accustomed to envelop herself lay as she had thrown it back, but it was empty. The cabin had no occupant save himself, and it had the peculiar feel of a deserted ruin.

Kitty was not there—had she come back at all?

"She said she would come," muttered Adam, staring blankly around.

"When I kept my word she would hardly deceive me so. I could have staked my life on her. Perhaps she wanted to watch for me from the outside, and when the trouble began something happened to her, and she ran the other way. Or, she may have fallen asleep. That must be it. Poor little Kitten! I will go back and find her. No one would harm such a child."

"Not quite so much a child as yer seems ter think, Gran'pa Adam," said a voice from the doorway.

"What's ther matter with her now?"

CHAPTER XV. THE TROUBLE ON THE TURN.

NEVER was there a more disgusted man than Uncle Ezra when he noted the return of Adam Appleby.

He had been watching the game so intently he did not observe him until a tremulous hand placed a check on the king, and he heard a somewhat familiar voice, saying:

"I am sure it is my night on, notwithstanding."

Ezra started at the sound.

"I bluffed him off once, but I guess he would not have gone if it hadn't bin fur ther girl. Blame it all! I suppose thar's nothin' ter do but ter let him win ef ther keyards say so. When yer goes ter buckin' ag'in' a hoodoo yer can't beat him, an' he brings every last mother's son of 'em 'round ther board inter luck."

So he muttered, and for a time his attention was principally centered on the game the old musician was playing.

The latter followed exactly the same line he had marked out on the opening deal, save that when the jack was reached he drew down all but five chips. These he watched go over to the bank without much sign of perturbation. The loss was a foregone conclusion.

After that he bet slower, and with more consideration, meeting with varying success, though all the while a little ahead of the game.

After some hours of alternate failure and success he had accumulated some seventy-five dollars' worth of chips, and then he boldly played the limit on his favorite card, the king.

There had been some attention from the outsiders, but the frequenters of the Living Light were too much accustomed to all sorts of company to think the presence of Adam Appleby singular. His music had been almost forgotten, and though there was a faint curiosity in regard to the man who had been the cause of the row in the early part of the evening, the fact that he was more or less under the protection of Nip Allison insured him fair treatment—until he had a stake worth running the risks to obtain.

But luck such as his was bound to come into notice sooner or later. Upon the whole, the bank was a winner, though, as there were no pronounced rushers in the game, the sum total

was not large. Some had dropped out, a few had taken their places, and everybody understood at last that Adam was ahead.

"Thar it are," thought the dealer, as he covertly watched the chips go up on the king.

"Ef he wins, man ner angels kin convince Nip we don't stan' in tergether. After ther causbun he give me he knows Limber Luke would be ready fur a angel; an' I spect I'll better spring ther keyards an' run ther chances. They are right whar I want 'em, an' ther wonder are ther ole fool didn't call ther turn."

There were still several turns to be made before the last one, in which the king was to appear. Knowing the position of the cards, and the work to be done, Ezra kept on with his deal; outwardly as stolid as any of his class, but secretly glad to see that by the way the bets were strung there were more to lose than to win unless he made the double pull he contemplated.

And finger and thumb of the left hand had just made the squeeze on the sides of the box which would allow the passage of the two cards when he heard Nip Allison's voice, right at his shoulder.

"It's a pretty game as it stands, and if the old man can carry off the whole bank he must have the chance. But all the same, I think I will go a leetle slower before I let a rounder come back again with the coin he has picked up in the house. Pull them slow, and pull them steady. At the Living Light merit always wins."

Ezra listened, and as he did so the pressure on the sides of the box relaxed, though his thumb mechanically went on pushing the top card from the box. He was not altogether certain of the meaning of Allison's warning, and if he had been he would probably have done just the same. Adam Appleby was again the winner.

Unless a man was very sure, there could be no kicking at the Living Light. And if he was he did it at his own risk.

When the turn was called no one had a word to say, and Adam drew down his stakes with a trembling hand, and a mind full of doubt as to his proper course.

"It's more than a hundred, now," he thought.

"Ought I to wait until I lose the excess, or go on to final victory? A promise is a promise; and the only way I can keep it is to—but, no! I forgot. It was a hundred I just won. Why did I not make it only forty, or double the limit and call the turn? My word to Kittle is my bond, and I will have to quit after all—if they let me."

With this last hope in his thoughts Adam gathered up his stack of chips, and turned toward the cashier. If only some one objected, so that he could plead necessity, how gladly he would stay with them all night, if the resources of the bank lasted so long.

"This time I suppose you are going to stay," remarked the cashier, with a sarcasm in his voice that cut the old man to the quick.

"Like all the rest of the pikers. Run a shoestring up to a good thing here, where the deal is on the square, and then hunt up a skin game somewhere else to blow it in. Good-morning. If Mr. Allison don't object it all goes."

He pushed the money over as he spoke or Adam might have altered his intentions; but all the time the latter was holding as tightly as he could to his promise to Kitty, and with the cash in his hand, he had everything to keep him straight. He made a lofty bow, a brief apology about a prior engagement, and was turning away.

"Jest a holy leetle minnit!"

A broad palm, reaching backward, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him around, against the table he had but just left.

"Mebbe it's all right, an' mebbe it's all wrong. W'ichever way it are yer ort ter hav a chance ter see afore yer leaves."

The speaker was one of the most unsuccessful players of the evening, and how much in earnest he was can be judged from the fact that though he held Adam in one hand, there was a revolver in the other, and he was well aware of the rules that regulated the bringing a charge against the methods of the dealer.

"What's biting you now, Neddy Gross? You want to be sure there is something worth the outcome when you begin by pulling alongside of my table. Slow and steady till we see the size of the flea."

The revolver in the hand of the man addressed as Neddy Gross was pointing almost as much at Nip Allison as it was at the dealer, but the proprietor made no offer to draw, or to move out of range. There was, however, a steely warning in his tones that calmed the passion in Gross's manner. He responded in a lower tone:

"I don't often kick, an' ef you held ther box, Mister Allison, mebbe I wouldn't say a word. But it looks ter me ez though ther war s'uthin' rotten 'bout ther way this hyer game bez whip-sawed 'round, an' this man bein' a stranger I jest want ter see him pull ther las' keard in ther box. Ef it's all straight I'll leave my place, an' be kin hav satisfacshun ary way he wants it."

"And maybe I'll be out a first class dealer. If there is any one to get satisfaction I will be the man. Investigate the box if you want to, but if it turns out all square, look out that you don't drop."

Neddy had grown cooler when he found it was Allison with whom he was to deal; and Nip was like an iceberg. It looked as though he was going to back his dealer, right or wrong.

Ezra looked on quietly, as though the revolver had no terrors for him. He made no motion to pull a weapon, and the box, with the bottom card still in sight, lay openly in his hand. Now, he ventured a remark.

"It's reyther late in ther day ter be puttin' in a kick, wen bets are paid, an' we're gittin' all ready fur a new deal. Reckon ther gent wants fight an' nothin' else. Ef so he don't better make no mistake. His Onkle Ezry are reddy, an' ther are no time like ther present. Ef somebody'll hole ther lantern we kin go out doors an' make Sunshine howl."

"It's not a fight I'm arter, pertick'ler; but it's ther inside ov the box. Wen that's spread open 'll be time ernough ter 'range 'bout ther rest. I ain't askin' offen, but I'm askin' mighty strong."

"Take yer dog-goned box, then!" shouted Ezra, with a sudden outburst of wrath, and springing to his feet he gave a dexterous toss that sent the silver card-receptacle full into the face of the grumbler, and before the latter could recover from the consequent confusion, whipped out his own revolvers, and was ready for any kind of business.

It looked as though he meant shoot; but, instead of that, he suddenly threw himself over backward, just as the report of a pistol echoed through the room.

The escape was a narrow one, for the bullet whizzed over his head as he went down, missed Nip Allison by a few inches, and buried itself in the wall.

At the attack Nip came to the front. Whatever might have been his intentions with regard to his dealer he did not hesitate when the shots began to come home. He had not seen the shot fired, but he sprung past the table in the direction whence it had seemed to come, and threw himself into the crowd.

The men gave back, stepping to this side and that. No one wanted to face him in his wrath, and no one could he see who looked as though he might have fired the shot.

Almost the first man he met was Tom Benham, who had just withdrawn his hand surreptitiously from the side-pocket to which it fitted.

There could be no question about which side he belonged to, and Allison listened to him as he spoke.

"Go slow, Nip. No one is after you; it is that dog-goned dealer you have in the chair. And if you are bound to back him I guess they will let him rest till some other evening. If they don't of course your friends are with you, and we will clean up the house. The man from Sacramento has his fingers on Neddy's sleeve, and that ought to be enough to make him listen to reason."

Nip looked around—more by reason that he could not see any one in front of him who seemed to need regulating, than because of Benham's argument.

Uncle Ezra was back in his chair, as unconcerned as though nothing had happened to cause him to vacate it; and Gross was listening to the sport with a charm for the very good reason that his wrists were crossed and held together as firmly as though they were locked in a set of handcuffs. Further back, D'Aubegne was looking on with a sneer on his handsome face.

"Some one has had a shot at me or at my dealer. It don't make much difference at whom he aimed, it came infernally near to both. One of us wants a shot back, if we have to give him another chance to get it. It was not you, Neddy. Your business can keep till we have this other matter settled. Now, who was it? I'll give a hundred dollars to know."

The offer was liberal enough to make the greater part of the spectators sell out their grandfathers; but there was no answer.

Reason enough, since no one knew. That is, no one save the man inquired for; and of course, he kept his own counsel.

Neddy had given one or two struggles to shake off the hand at his wrists, and then relapsed into mute quiescence. There was no use to exert himself further, and just at present he had nothing to say. Seeing this Sacramento Sam dropped his wrists and turned toward Allison.

"Of course I have no interest in this except that I always take up for the house. I don't think there is any question about your methods, it is only in regard to those of your dealer. Some sort of a charge seems to have been made, and it might be as well to investigate it. What has become of the box?"

Nobody knew. From the time it was carried off of Neddy's cheek it had not been seen, and though a search was made on the floor it failed to come to light.

"This gentleman," continued the man from Sacramento, indicating Neddy Gross by a motion of his thumb, "seems to have spoken a little too late. It would have been better to have either been more prompt in mentioning his suspicions, or else kept them altogether to himself. In the absence of the box it resolves itself into

a personal matter between him and the dealer, always providing there is no further evidence on the subject. As both seem handy with the irons probably they would prefer settling the difference of opinion in that way."

"Now ye'r shoutin'!" exclaimed Neddy, glad that there was an opening to escape facing Nip.

"An' I'm yer mutton!" retorted Ezra, rising with alacrity.

"Thar's bin ernough chin music, le'st try ther other kind; an' ef all hands are agreeable, right hyer an' now suits me to a charm."

"Guess not," interposed Allison, who had calmed down since he found the danger of a general riot was over.

"Until you prove foul play against a man who is working for me, he is safe in my house, and I don't propose to have any window-lights broken without damaging a few heads to pay for it. If there is to be any more racket it must be done out of doors; and the old man don't move a step unless he wants to."

"Didn't I told yer so?"

Ezra spoke in great glee.

"Fur a man ter tie to Nip takes ther cake, an' I won't furgit that he took in a ole side-pard when he war lookin' mighty much like ther latter eend ov a hard winter. But with him looks don't count. Au' would I go now fur ter be mussin' up his floor, an' pilin' up a stiff in ther back room, with a c'rowner's eenquist, an' sich? Not by no manner ov means. Out doors we go—an'sum ov you handy galoots bring a shutter along fur ther use ov ther second best man. I kerry my own weepins, an' I reckon Neddy kerries bissen. Stranger, ef it's not askin' too much, an' seein' that Mister Allison hez his han's full lookin' arter his own concerns, will you stan' by me, an' see fair play?"

"Not with any particular pleasure; but because I never refuse a request of the kind. I suppose it will be the regular thing. Step thirty paces apart in the middle of the street, and then go as you please."

"Good enough for me!" responded each man; and then all filed out.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUEL IN THE DARK.

SACRAMENTO SAM did not seem any too well pleased with his principal, but as they passed through the doorway he took occasion to whisper:

"Look out for the man who fired the shot over the table. He may try it again. Looks to me as though there was some sort of game being set up on you. That Neddy is not half as anxious to kill you as is some one else. He does the blowing, but the other fellow is to do the work."

"Let'er go at that, pard, let'er go. I'm lookin' out fur number one, an' when I can't rake ther sleepers on ther table, it's time ter close ther game, an' go ter bed on ther other side ov ther range. Yankee all ther same. I dunno how yer got in with that crowd, but ye'r white, anyhow."

"One moment, if you please."

They were on the porch, and Ezra's foot was already raised to step off, when the interruption came.

"One minnit goes. Try ter make it two, an' ther war will begin at home."

It was Johnny who had spoken, and he came out, puffing in his haste.

"That's my suit of clothes you have on, and it strikes me there is a mighty good chance for there being some holes in them shortly after they get in the middle of the street, to say nothing of mud, and the unpleasantness of taking them off a dead man. Suppose you either shuck yourself, or else leave a deposit to cover the damages. I always want to do as the boss says, but I swear I can't afford to lose the broadcloth."

"Be equinomikle and you'll be happy. That's right, Johnny! Ef I see yer ag'in I'll settle fur 'em—they ain't fur off frum my size, an' suit me to a charm. An' ef I don't, ax the boss fur my percentages often ther night's work, an' they'll make yer even."

As Johnny did not know how the game had gone he was by no means certain there were any percentages coming to the speaker, but he was forced to be content, since Ezra stepped away, and it might not have been altogether safe to follow him into the street. He stood in the line on the sidewalk watching the proceedings with just a trifle more interest than the rest of them, since he was not sure whether his broadcloth would be a total loss or not. The strength of the stranger's hand was unknown, while it was certain that Neddy Gross was a close shooter.

There were few words more said as to the arrangements. Sacramento Sam, acting as master of ceremonies, placed the two duelists back to back.

"One!" he counted.

At that each man stepped away, keeping on stepping as Sam continued counting, until the number fifteen was reached.

"Fifteen! Fire!"

At the signal the two faced about, and there was an almost simultaneous discharge from three pistols. And the flash of one of them

clearly shone from the line of spectators on the sidewalk.

"Both down, and here's another man badly wounded!" exclaimed Johnny.

"He took a shot at the man with the broadcloth coat on, and I knocked him west end crooked. Maybe I hit him a shade sooner than he fired, but I'll swear to his good intentions. Who is he?"

Johnny just had time to say this much, and then, as he stooped toward the fallen man, his hand warily on his revolver for fear there would be another shot at him, there came a rush from behind which sent him heels over head into what passed for the gutter, and there was such a chorus of shouting and yelling he knew next to nothing for a little.

When he picked himself up, his clothing pretty much in the condition he had expected that of Uncle Ezra to be, there was a gang of men ramping around, but no signs of the one he had hit, nor did any one seem to be able to say who it had been, or what had become of him.

"He war only a outsider, but Sunshine don't allow sich a gun game. Who war it tired that shot?"

"Fair play forever!"

"Ketch him, an' string him up!"

So they shouted; and there was so much confusion over the side issue the principals were almost forgotten. To hear them talk one would have thought they were wild over the treachery which had laid out one of the principals in a regularly arranged duel.

So they ought to have been, but Johnny knew a thing or two, and without uttering a word of protest got back out of the way, shaking his head, thinking to himself he had no further business in the crowd when the Saints of Sunrise were going to take a hand.

"I might make a guess at who it was, but perhaps it would be safer to keep my mouth shut. The mischief is done, and it's not hard to see that it was laid out from the first. Only, the fellow didn't fire soon enough to save Neddy."

There was where he was mistaken. Two or three men were about stepping out to investigate the supposed corpses when the fracas in the middle of the street began again in earnest.

First, Neddy raised himself cautiously on one elbow.

Instantly there came a flash and a report, a bullet whizzing so close to his face that he dodged down at once, and throwing his pistol-hand forward tried a shot at the spot where his antagonist was supposed to be lying.

"Oh, ye'r no good!" shouted back Uncle Ezra.

"It war go ez yer please after ther ball opened, an' this suits me to er charm. Them frien's ov yourn what hez bin tryin' ter git in the'r side work can't bit me hyar in a week, an' ef you try ter come nearer I got yer sure. Try another one, an' see ef yer can't warm me up a lit. That's ther only 'jection; it's too cool hyer, in ther mud, for comfort."

Now that they were lying at full length on the ground it was more faith than eyesight that made them visible to the spectators; and as to the men themselves, it certainly seemed that imagination would have to do its duty before they could trace out the limits of each other's craniums.

Neddy raised his head an inch or two, and thought he could see what he was after. He drew his hand forward and tried it again.

"Ough!" came a grunt from the spot he had aimed at, and then silence.

The bullet had doubtless hit; but how hard? He was afraid to risk any nearer approach until he had tried it again.

Interference from the sidewalk was at an end. When it was certain there had been an attempt at foul play, Nip Allison came to the front, where Sacramento Sam had already been having his say-so. Others stood behind them, for various reasons; and it was certain that any further foul play would precipitate such a riot as Sunshine had seldom seen.

"That time I got yer, did I?" laughed Neddy, a little nervously, and hugging the ground as closely as he could.

"Gittin' warm ernough ter suit yer, are it? Say some more an' I'll try ter suit yer to a charm. I'm jest gittin' ther hang ov ther range, an' don't furgit that I ain't tetchet ther other shooter. Thar's a dozen loads, er tharabouts, an' I reckon I kin make yer mighty oncomfor'ble afore they're all out ov the'r holes."

"An' what'll I be doin'?" was the answer in a smothered voice. "Jest blaze away with them dozen loads, an' then I'll commence ag'in, an' give yer one that I hev big money a-sayin' yer can't kerry."

Ezra was either scared or hurt; that much Neddy was sure of when he heard his answer. Without delay he let drive, not one shot only, but two or three, sending them one after the other at the dark object at which he had been aiming.

"How's that? Mebbe I got yer now?"

"Mebbe yer got my hat; but blame me ef I ain't got you."

The answer came from his side, and it is doubtful if Gross heard it to the end, for long before

he had finished, Ezra was on his back, holding him down with both knees, and one hand twisted in his hair.

"It war to be go ez yer please after we opened fire, an' this hyer are ther way that I please," he continued, twisting the pistol out of Neddy's hand.

"Now, you jest yell that yer got ernough er I'll bu'st yer dog-goned cocoanut, an' leave a corpus fur the town ter berry."

Gross made a desperate effort to turn the man on top, but Ezra might have weighed a ton and held him no more securely. He was well mounted, secure in the saddle, so to speak, and now had both hands on the back of Neddy's neck, jowling him to the ground.

"May ez well squeal fu'st ez last. I kin hire a boy ter bring me grub and drink, an' sit hyer fur a year, ter say nothin' ov w'ot I might do ef I got tired. Say ther word, now! Will yer squeal, er shell I begin ter mash yer?"

Excitement changed to amusement. At the sudden appearance of Uncle Ezra at the exact spot where he was least expected, every one save a few of Neddy's more particular pals broke into a laugh. The cheering and clapping of hands that arose during the next minute or two were tremendous. The ranks on the sidewalk broke, since there was no immediate dread of pistol balls, and the crowd surged around the two.

"Not too close, if you please," urged Sacramento Sam, still looking out for the interests of his principal.

"There has been some back-handed work already, and wedon't want any more of it. It is go as you please, now; and if Gross can't do that let him throw up his hands."

"Oh, dry up, stranger!" answered some one near by.

"Don't get the crowd down on you. Don't you see they're all a-la'lin'? They won't 'low ary skull-duggery—but they're ripe ter be dangerous ef they go off on another trail."

The advice was well meant, and the sport received it in good part.

Anyhow, the fun was about over. There was a pressure being applied, gentle at first, but gradually increasing, which the crowd had no chance to note. It was stopping the wind off slowly but surely, and Gross was not too game to hollown when the right time came.

"Let up!" he gurgled.

"Ther box war square ez a die, an' I didn't lose much, aryhow. Ef ther gerloots w'ot did kin pocket the'r losses I kin eat crow, an' say no more 'bout it. Let me up an' we'll all take a drink et my expense. I am out fur ther present: but when we meet ag'in, look fur yer life. Neddy Gross don't allow a man ther chance ter git away with him in thet style twicet over. By this time ter-morrer somebody'll drap—an' it won't be me."

"All right. Hyer's yer pop-guns. Reckon they'll hev ter go to ther shop afore usin' 'em, but they're better than nothin' ter start with."

"Much oblieged, gents all, fur ther'spectful 'tenshun, an' now that ther fun's all over I leave it fur me ole side-pard, Nip Allison, ter set 'em up fur ther house, an' I'll go home ter bed, afore ther troublie begins ag'in, an' I hev ter butcher 'bout a dozzin ov these lam's."

CHAPTER XVII.

ADAM IS ASTOUNDED.

THE voice heard by Adam Appleby belonged to Ezra, and the former recognized it even before he had turned to face the intruder.

No one followed the tramp when he took his unceremonious leave of the crowd in front of the Living Light.

For that matter, no one could have done it very handily, unless prepared beforehand for the move. He vanished so suddenly when he was done speaking, and hastened away by such a devious route, that it would have taken a man nimble of foot and keen of sight to have kept him in view.

It was the merest chance he turned up here, and had a view of the old man through the open door. He saw there was trouble in the cabin, and approached near enough to hear the soliloquy. Of course, he also recognized the winner at the game which had lately been broken up.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Adam. "Have you come to rob me of my winnings? I am only an old man, broken by sickness and poverty; but they were fairly obtained, and I will make a fight for them to the end. They belong long to the Kitten and me. Be off with you, before I shoot!"

"Ha. ha! Shoot erway, ole man! Shoot ther hat! Shoot yer frien'! That's ther way it goes in this world. Me a-bringin' yer luck by ther bu'kit full; an' you a-tryin' ter take me life 'cause I axed a civil questshun, with ther idear ov doin' yer still furder good. I'll give it to yer straight, now; an' you kin do ez yer please. Tell me yer ree'l name an' whar yer come frum, an' blessed ef I don't stan' up an' take ther chances ov one shot, jest fur ther sake ov ther fun in it."

"My name, sir, is one that I have no reason to be ashamed of. Nearly any one in Sunshine can tell it to you, and it hardly seems worth while for me to repeat it. Why you should

Double-Cinch Dan.

want to know it I cannot guess; but I can give it, and then I hope you will go. It is—is—Adam Appleby."

So far the old man got, though he finished his sentence only by an effort. Then, he broke into a spasm of coughing, though it was not as severe as the one which racked his frame when Jean Jaimeson came to his rescue.

Ezra watched him calmly, and without attempt at interference, until he dropped down, exhausted but done.

"An' orful pity it w'u'd 'a' bin ter hev went over ther range with sich a whopper on yer lips. 'F I war you I'd aim a leetle nearer to ther truth, even ef I didn't bit ther mark."

"What do you mean by that, sir? Oh, if the Kitten was only here?"

"An' w'o are ther Kitten? 'Pears ez tho' yer dealin' in parybles ter nite."

"My granddaughter, sir, my granddaughter; though why you should ask, or I should answer, is more than I can understand."

"Thar it are ag'in; an' you with one foot in ther grave, an' the other draggin' along ther same way. Bet'cher she's no kith ner kin; an' I'm willin' ter go ther limit that I know jest w'os han's she's gone inter, though I ain't heard a thing about it. Oh, I ain't bin hyer long, but I think I got ther ropes down mighty fine, ez fur ez tellin' w'o's w'o, an' t'other frum w'ich."

"Man alive! Don't torture me! If you know anything about the child tell it to me at once, but keep me waiting here no longer. I must go and search for her. Some other time come back and I will talk to you. You have some strange notions, but I do not think you intend to harm me, after all."

"Wouldn't hurt a hair ov yer head, ef you did play smash with my game ter night. An' ef the leetle girl are hurt it'll be jest acause they think she are yer gran'child. 'F they knowed ther truth, 'pears ter me she'd be ez safe ez a penny in a pig's mouth. You kin go look fur her, but you won't find her. Not, unless I'm 'way off in my reckonin'."

"But why, why should any one want to harm her because she is a relative of mine? Poor child! For that reason they should wish to do her good. She has been so faithful—the staff and stay when I needed both and had none other."

"Thar's money in it; thar's money in it. What more reason would you want?"

"Money!"

Adam's voice was full of scorn.

"When we live in this hovel, and I sacrificed my manhood this very night, and played a mouth-organ in a bar-room so that she and I should not starve. Unless some one knows more of my claim than I have yet found out. It may yield a fortune when bed-rock is reached, but the chances are no better than if it was one of a dozen that can be bought for a song. What work I have yet done on it has scarcely brought me a color."

"Sure ernough, ef you be on'y Adam Appleby, down on his luck, an' livin' in a hut with his gran'daughter."

"But ef you war some one else, now, that hed a rich brother back East, an' ther rich brother war dead; an' ef you war outer the road, an' didn't leave no gran'darter ter take w'ot o'rter b'long ter you; don'cher think yer next heir might make ther biggest kind ov play ter git hold ov a million? That's about ther size ov it; an' you stickin' to it yer name's Adam Appleby."

"A million! A million! Adam Appleby! Brother dead!"

The old man had risen eagerly, and listened with an anxiety that shone plainly enough in his countenance when he heard the mention of the rich brother. In a disconnected, breathless way he muttered the words, clapping his hand to his forehead and staggering back until he reached the wall.

"Thet's ther way it looks ter me. Ov course, ef yer don't know ther name ov yer brother that's your loss, an' I'm sorry all over fur yer."

"Thanks! You have told me enough. Tonight I care not to hear more. I can investigate the truth of this story at my leisure. What is the million to me if anything has happened to Kitty? Let me go, now. I will see you again, and thank you when I am not quite so nearly broken up. Let me pass?"

"Suttinly, ter be sure. An' ef it will do ver ary good I'll help yer hunt fur her, though I don't think it will be ary use tell daylight; an' not prezactly a child's game then. Come on! Where do you want to go first ov all?"

"I left her not far from the Living Light Saloon. She was to come home and wait for me while I went back and played for a hundred dollars. I was gone longer than I thought, and when I returned I found that she was not here. Perhaps she has missed me on the way, and is looking for me at the saloon. We have wasted too much time, too much time. I must go and see."

"Guess you had better; an' I'll look 'round at some other p'ints. Do ther best yer kin 'bout me, fur I don't b'lieve I bev a call ter visit ther s'lloons ag'in ter-night. I'm well outen ther game, an' I better give 'em a chance ter think matters over afore I pear on ther carpet ag'in."

I war jest a-feelin' ov 'em, an' things war a-pannin' out beautiful, ef you hadn't stepped in ter hoodoo my game. All right, ole man. Hope you'll find her. Ef yer don't, I'll see yer in ther mornin'."

Ezra certainly had a very good excuse for parting company with the old gentleman, and Adam did not attempt to urge him, though now that the reaction had come, he felt so weakened by his adventures of the night he was afraid he would not be able to hold out in his search for any great length of time.

He was not at all sure his presence would be tolerated again in the Living Light, since he had twice that evening caused a disturbance, or at least the disturbances had followed his being there. As he found no trace of Kitty outside, he ran the risks, and cautiously entered.

No Kitty was there, and making a few guarded inquiries to assure himself she had not been seen, he hurried home again, sick at heart, and afraid that his limbs would not carry him there. If he found her it would be all right. If he did not, who was to continue the search?

The lamp was still burning when he reached the door, but—the room was still vacant. He gave one glance inside, and then fell senseless across the threshold.

How long he lay there he never could tell, though it seemed to him that hours must have elapsed when he recovered a dim consciousness, and crawled again into his lair. He was too weak and shattered for more exertion, and lay huddled in his ragged blanket, wearily wondering what had become of the Kitten.

Now and then he remembered the hints, or more than hints, of Uncle Ezra, but it was with little real interest. Just then he had no thoughts for anything but the girl who was so dear to him; and he was scarcely able to think connectively of her.

After a little he ceased to think even of her, and fell into a sleep that remained unbroken until broad daylight.

Then he awoke with a start, and feeling as though his strength had all been renewed. When he looked around, the first thing he saw was Kitty, lying by his side, sound asleep, and wrapped up in her blanket.

He sprung to his feet and stood staring down at her in a puzzled sort of way.

"Good heavens! The whole thing, then, must have been a dream!"

"Guess not, grandpa! While it lasted it was very real, and once in a while I thought I would never get here again. There are some bad folks in the world, and a few of them are after us."

"But, tell me where you have been, and how it comes that you were not here when I got back. Oh, it nearly killed me. I looked around for you a little, but was too weak to do much, and when I got back, once more to find you still were not here I must have fainted away. Afterward I was too weak to do more than crawl in, to die as I thought. If you had not been here when I woke I think it might have killed me."

"Oh, I guess not, grandpa. You are not made of that kind of material. You would have kept on looking for me until I met you and told you what an old goose you were for troubling yourself, when all you had to do was to give me time and I would come home of myself. They couldn't keep me."

"Don't be too sure of that. You have been too young, and I too old, and both of us too poor to be troubled in the past; but perhaps all that has been changed. I heard something while you were gone; or, I think I heard it. I—I really cannot tell. I am stronger than ever, but my head is not altogether as clear as it might be on that point. It might have been a dream. Yes, yes, it might have been a dream."

"How about the faro, grandpa? Was that a dream, too? I tell you, I was thinking a heap sight more about that than I was about myself. Did you lose all those chips?"

"I—I—am sure I don't know. I thought I won, but now I am sure of nothing till I see it. I will look. I thought I had more than a hundred dollars."

Kitty broke into a laugh.

"It was lucky for us I came home when I did. The door was wide open, and your pocket-book on the floor. Some one would have been sure to have come along and seen it, and then, good-by John! I hid it and the purse away and fastened the door. After that, I slept with one eye open, and a hand on the revolver. It was just as well that no one came prowling around. When I saw all that wealth I was ready for anything. But this morning it don't look to be so much, after all, and I don't believe they will be very desperate in trying to get hold of it. You don't think that was what they were after when they grabbed me last night? Why, you hadn't begun to play. It helps us out, of course, but we are not rich yet, by a long sight."

"It must, then, have been true," said Adam, reflectively.

"At least, he must have said it, though I am afraid there are few who would take his word on oath."

"Yet, what interest could he have in lying; and how could he have guessed at the truth?"

"And then, again, how could he have known it? It is a mystery; all a mystery. It might be a trap; but who has laid it?"

"What are you talking about, grandpa? What is a mystery; and who could have laid a trap?"

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you, yet you are wise beyond your years, and will not be too soon possessed of folly. I think I may risk it—and yet, I must hear your own adventures first. They, at least, were real; and I must know in how much danger you have been."

"Bother my adventures. I was in no danger at all. Go on with what you heard. If it was anything good of course it was true. Don't you see luck has come our way at last; and when it comes won't it come with a perfect roll? Who was talking to you?"

"A man who told me that you were not my grandchild."

Ezra eyed the child sharply as he spoke, and she returned the look in kind.

"Bother that part! We know he told the truth! What next?"

"How is that? Do you believe it?"

"Certainly, to be sure. Do you think I don't remember? If you were my real grandpa, do you think I would care for you so? It is because you picked up and stuck to a brat like me that I think you are the dearest man in the world. If I was only rich, you should never do another stroke of work by day, and play faro every night if you wanted to. It is because we can't afford it that I object. But go on with the news. The sooner you get through, the sooner you will hear mine. You said something about being rich."

"This man—it is hard to believe him! When I saw him about town to-day, he was ragged, dirty and apparently drunk. This evening he was dealing faro at the Living Light."

"Slightly mixed you are. It is broad daylight; but, go on, anyhow."

"He told me, then, that my brother was dead, and had left me heir to a million."

"Hou la! Sell the Red Dog and go East! We are done with Sunshine."

"Not so fast! He said that someone was trying to get you out of the way first, and follow up with an attack on me; and that somebody would be the next heir. Who could that somebody be?"

The Kitten became grave.

"You ought to know. What other kin had he?"

"Only a daughter; and she I thought was dead."

"Bet you a dollar, grandpa, that she is not dead, and that she is in Sunshine. We must look out for her."

CHAPTER XVIII. KITTY TELLS HER STORY.

THE wisdom of childhood had a lesson ready for the man of mature years, and he was not slow to take it.

"Strange I never thought of that before—though, to tell the truth, I had scarcely thought at all on the subject. My mind was too full of you. Now, it is your turn. You will hear no more till I know where you were last night, and how you came to be here when I awoke this morning."

"Not much to tell, though it seemed a good deal to go through while it was happening."

"But tell me what it was, and leave out nothing. There may be a clew in it. There must be. You saw some one, and went somewhere."

"Perhaps I did, but you can't prove it by me. Let me see. I was going along, a little after I left you. I wasn't in a bit of a hurry, for I knew you wouldn't be at home for some time, if you had the least bit of luck. I had tried to look in the window, but I couldn't reach up, and I knew there was no use to stand on tip-toe outside. Then, all of a sudden, I knew nothing at all, I was so mixed up. You can guess when I tell you I actually wanted to scream."

"Poor child! It must have been terrible. What happened to you?"

"I reckon it was a man. As near as I could make out, some one had wrapped me up in a blanket. I would have screamed, too, if the nasty thing had not been kept over my mouth so tight I could hardly get breath, let alone make a noise."

"Then Mister Somebody lifted me off the ground, and started away as though he was running a race for a thousand dollars, and meant to win it. I was all fuddled up, I can tell you, and when he had run ever so long he set me down, and there I was."

"Where?"

"Don't ask me, for I can't tell. I guess it was in a room, for it felt that way; but I didn't hear any doors open and shut. All I know is, someone says: 'There is your brat, take a look at her and see what you make of her.'

"That sounded like a man, and the way the hands felt that were 'round my wrists I was pretty sure it was a grown man, and maybe, one who didn't work every day in his life; but it was dark as pitch, and he stood behind me,

reaching over. His voice was gruff enough, but it hardly sounded natural."

"But the other person? How was he or she to take a look at you?"

"I'm coming to that. I didn't say a word, but I did give a jump when there was a bright light, shining straight in my face, though I couldn't see a bit more than before."

"It was held there a long time, as though the person was never going to get tired looking at me, and still I didn't say anything. The light began to hurt my eyes, and so I sort of turned my head away, though I kept them wide open. I didn't know how soon I might be able to see something. When I did that the other somebody gave a start, I know; the light dodged around a bit as though it was almost dropped; and I heard a rustle coming toward me. Then, the glare came up again, and I stood for another spell."

Kitty ceased speaking, and looked downward reflectively. What came next was not so certain, because she had guessed a good deal, and heard very little.

"I am not sure of the rest. Somehow, I thought there was a step coming around me when the light went out, and I smelled something sweet, but I got very tired about that time and when the man's hands let go of my wrists I went down all in a heap."

"Ah! Chloroform, or something like it!" exclaimed Adam.

"Perhaps it was. That's the thing makes people go to sleep whether they want to or not. What came next I don't know for sure, but when the swimming in my head cleared away a little I thought I heard people whispering in the other corner of the room, or wherever I was, and this is what they were saying:

"I had seen her before, but I never noticed. With that look on her face I can't do anything till I think. Wait! There is no hurry."

"How long is it going to take to make up your mind? I ought to be back now, and if I don't get there soon I'll have to be making up a mighty good reason. What has looks got to do with it?"

"You cannot understand. She looks like some one I once knew, and—I don't know what is the matter with me, but I want and must have time to think. There may be a change in the plans, and if so, something done now might be a mistake. It has all been so sudden."

"We can't afford to keep her cooped up here. So far, she knows nothing; if you don't want her now, what's the matter with taking her out and turning her loose? It is not often you change your mind, and when you do I suppose it is because there is a good reason for it."

"Very true; and you know, I only wanted to see her. I thought, perhaps—but that may be. Yes, take her back where you got her. She will come to her senses in a few minutes, and no one would believe her if she told the truth. She will not be hard to get another time, when we want her worse. If we could send her to—Mexico, it might do just as well."

"A heap sight better and not much harder to do on a day's notice, or so. It all goes just as you say. You have never known me to grumble, and I am not going to kick now. Off she goes."

"I knew it wouldn't do to let them know I had heard what they had been saying, so I kept as still as a mouse, and just let myself hang over his arm when he picked me up. All the same, I was scared enough when the blanket came down over my head again, and he was carrying me off. What if he should know that I was alive?"

"Well, he took me along under his arm, just as though I was a sack of potatoes, shook me out at last as if he didn't care whether he broke any bones or not, and there I was, in a heap, just where he picked me up. I lay still a little while after he went away, and then picked myself up and came home. That's all there is of it."

"And a precious plenty. That man was right. They will sacrifice you first of all, and then be after me. And I can guess what it was in your face to cause the hesitation. I saw it there when you were a child so small I had thought you had forgotten the time. That was the reason I took you. Heaven knows it was no great kindness to attach you to my own miserable fortunes, and drag you around from pillar to post, among scenes that should never meet the eye of a child."

"Come, grandpa! If you had not taken me where would I have been now? Not as well off, you can be sure. And when we get rich I am going to make up to you for all the trouble and worry I know I have been. Just now, you know, there is so little time. We have to rustle so hard for a living."

She snuggled up like the kitten she was called after, and purred around the old man, while he stroked her head, and looked down at her face, and thought of a past very much beyond the vista of the young girl's furthest recollections.

She submitted to his absentminded caresses for a time, and then became practical.

"This is all very well, but there is work to

be done to-day; and it is ever so late. I must say, I am hungry as a bear. If you want any warm coffee you can be looking around for chips, while I make the fire and spread the table. For once there is something in the cupboard."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN IN THE ROOM.

WITH the disappearance of Uncle Ezra, the trouble at the Living Light was over for the evening.

The night, indeed, was pretty well advanced, and it was hardly worth while to open the game once more, since the players all seemed to have had enough of it.

There was some laughing and talking, a good deal of drinking, and several games of draw might have been found going on if any one had looked in the other room. Sacramento Sam had not come to the front a whit further than he could help, but he found that between the affair with Big Bert, and his late position as second to the missing dealer, he was both well and favorably known, and had to decline a dozen invitations to drink to save his head, which was one of the hardest.

The game with D'Aubegne and the others was off for the night, since Chet did not make his appearance until about the time, the affair had begun in the street, and by the time that was over, there were too many other things to think of.

"All right, if you say so," laughed the man from Sacramento.

"I didn't start out on the war-path, by any means. I like to look over the ground a little when I land in a new place. Sometimes I don't take hold at all. If I get away from town with all my wealth, don't kick yourself too hard. I have done that same thing more than once before."

"Thanks, awfully," returned Chet.

"I was sorry afterwards I had made the engagement, but did my best to keep it. If tomorrow night will suit you as well, it will please me a great deal better."

This was the way it came that Sacramento Sam drifted back to the Little Lamb several hours earlier than he had expected, and quietly made his way to the room to which the landlord had assigned him in the early part of the evening.

The Little Lamb was a big barn of a building, one story in height, and divided off with partitions of rather a primitive nature.

There was the "office," in which the lounging was mostly done, and which contained the bar of the establishment, well stocked with the one article of drink known in Sunshine—whisky.

Then there was a dining-room, several dormitories for the average patron, and several cuddly-holes for those who might desire rooms to themselves. These latter had been formed out of one larger room, and the partitions were of the flimsiest character, being partly board, and partly canvas. The doors were the most substantial things about them, being solid enough, and fitted with bolts strong enough for a jail.

When Sacramento Sam sought his room he went quietly enough, and as he made no noise in opening his door, it would have been possible for the occupant of the next room to have been awake, and yet not heard him enter.

He dropped silently upon the edge of his bed, and began to pull off his boots.

A slight noise on the other side of the partition caused him to suspend operations, and listen closely. It sounded to him as though some one was raising the window very cautiously.

"Hum!" thought Sam.

"There is something suspicious about that. Is it some one trying to get in, or some one trying to go out. Not my chip on the face of it, but if it is burglars there is no telling where they will stop. Better go one eye on it if I can find a crack."

The finding of the crack was a matter of no great difficulty, for at that stage of the game a gleam of light shone through the wall and then vanished.

"Burglars for a dollar! That was the flash of a dark-lantern. Probably the fellow holding it slipped a little as he got through the window. Thankee! I know where to find what I was looking for. There will be a spectator of your diversions, and perhaps an unwelcome intruder. I don't often have serious intentions; but it is wonderful the capacity I have for getting into the thick of a scrape when there is one within fourteen blocks of where I bail from. What is he up to now?"

Sam had found the spot in the wall for which he had been searching, and already had his eye to the orifice.

At first it was precious little he could see with any distinctness.

The light had been covered again, and there was no sound on the other side to guide his vision.

Then, all of a sudden, the little, round halo he had been expecting made its appearance. He could not see the intruder, but he could understand what he was after, for the light lay on a valise which stood against the foot of the wall. While he stared, a pair of hands took hold of the

valise, and opened it in a scientific and workman-like manner.

"Shall I or sha'n't I?" thought Sam, feeling behind him for his revolver.

"If I was that fellow in the bed, who seems to sleep sounder than the famous seven, I would take it as a neighborly act; but there is no telling. He might think I wanted to intrude. It is hardly worth while risking it just for the fun of seeing the fellow jump. And I might not even have that pleasure. He knows how to manage his 'darkey,' and he may be loon enough to dive at the shot. But if he comes my way he will be open to a genuine surprise. Hey! He don't seem to be after plunder, after all!"

The valise was open, and Sam caught sight of a pair of hands rummaging over its contents. As he said to himself, they were not after plunder for they were attracted by nothing but a package of papers, secured together by a gum band. These when found were hustled out, and apparently examined.

"Oh, this is going a little too far!" thought Sacramento Sam.

"I can't stand it any longer. I must have a hand in."

The simplest plan would no doubt have been to raise a warning call.

That would no doubt awaken the sleeper on the bed, and the intruder would beat a retreat.

Only, the sport thought of a good deal in a very short time; and it struck him there was a chance for the occupant of the room to get hurt before he could collect his wits. He brought his revolver up to the crack, and taking aim as best he could fired at the lantern.

There was a good deal of guess work about it, but the shot went true. There was a crash, and the lantern was knocked endways.

Then followed a light-footed rush as the intruder made for the window, and just as the man who had been sleeping sprung to the floor, something dropped on the head of the sport, causing him to dodge away from the partition, with the momentary idea that he was going to have a visit himself.

Of course the sound went all through the house, awakening everybody; but there was no immediate inquiry as to what it meant. It was policy to wait a little, and see if the flourish of firearms had ended before visiting the scene of action. The landlord got there first, and it was not hard to quiet him when he came. A brief explanation sent him outside, to look for traces of the burglar, taking along with him the curious ones as he went.

Meantime two men inside were getting acquainted.

"Hello, pard, in there, strike a light and take stock of damages. He was overhauling your baggage, and I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to put in a chip. I suspect you will find a lantern there with a hole in it. And something dropped in here—came through the upper part of the partition, I reckon. Better show a glim myself, and see what it was. Are you sure you are wide awake at last?"

"Tolerably," laughed back Jean Jaimeson.

"Fact is, I wouldn't like to swear I was asleep at all. It was a very pretty bit of work as it was, and I wanted to see the end of it. Thanks all the same. I was just wondering how I was to get him out of the room without his going feet foremost."

Sacramento Sam lit his lamp, and looked around on the floor.

He found a little packet, which he recognized as the bundle drawn from the valise. As he turned it over he saw a letter on the outside, addressed "Jean Jaimeson, Esq."

The envelope looked as though it had been carried for some time, but further than that Sam did not investigate. When he saw that his neighbor also had his lamp lighted he called across:

"If your name, or your friend's name, is Jaimeson, I have something belonging to you. The rat was looking at it when I fired, and gave it a toss overhead. I see the hole in the canvas through which it came. Will you come for it, or shall I bring it over?"

"Hold on to it! I'll be there in a minute. Hope the fellow was satisfied, though what he was overhauling my affairs for is more than I can guess. Mighty sociable place this Sunshine is. I have only been here for a few hours, and in that time they have tried to shoot me, tried to hang me and tried to rob me. Wonder what next will be on the carpet?"

As he spoke Jaimeson came through the doorway in his stocking feet. He took the package which Sam handed him, and giving it a careless glance, dropped it into his pocket.

"Wouldn't have been much loss if I had never found it; but I would have hated them to get that far ahead of me. Shakes!"

The two men shook hands without further question.

"It's rather late in the night, but I suppose the bar might be open," said Sam, after having disposed of the landlord after the manner already explained.

"Out here a fellow is 'most always dry, and if you feel like it we might adjourn."

"Thanks, but this suits me better. After showing them that we are awake I don't sup-

pose it is necessary to stand guard all night. We might have a little chat together, to get better acquainted, and then go to bed in earnest. What's that you got there? Queer sort of a thing to have on your watch-guard."

"Nothing much, as you look at it; but a heap according to my view. Nothing but a pearl button I picked up one day; but I imagined it brought me luck, and have hung on to it ever since. If you ever sit on the other side of the table you will see me finger it as the deal goes on. As long as I can hold on to that I generally win. Ever have anything of the kind yourself?"

"Can't say that I did, but it's nothing singular. Have known more than one man who had his notions about something of the kind bringing him luck. Right or wrong, they believe in it."

"Yes, we are all a queer set of fish, and laugh at things in others we do ourselves, every day. Can't see how a button can make a man win or lose; but I have stuck to it closer than to a brother ever since I took the notion it was a lucky find. And it lay around in my trunk for a year before I dreamed anything of the kind."

Sam spoke as though he might be rather ashamed to let his fancy be known, but the fact was, wherever he located it did not take long for those who knew him to learn something of the history of the button he carried, and he had so often been called the Sport with a Charm, he had accepted the title as peculiarly his own, and sometimes mentioned it of his own accord.

Having made this much of an explanation he turned the conversation in another direction, and before long the two were giving their experiences around town.

"And so, you see," continued Jaimeson, "I was not sure when the opening of the window woke me, whether the fellow was alone, or had all Sunshine at his back. If the former I wanted to know what he was after; and if the latter, I wanted to go slow. You can't hurry a mob, though sometimes a mob burries you."

"Well, it is pretty certain there is some one setting up a game of some kind on you," answered Sam.

"And it ought not to be so very hard to find out who that somebody is. The men you have been meeting were only working up the case according to orders; what you want to find out is, who is behind them. And if you can get some one who knows the town to talk, he can tell you who is the head of the gang. Then you can commence to hit back."

"Of course! Of course! But, at the same time, it appears to me the thing is all a mistake, and if I could only get the chance I could convince them of the fact."

"Maybe you have done so already. From the trouble that fellow took to get a sight of the papers in your valise it looks as though there was some doubt on the subject, and if what he saw was enough to convince them the mistake had been made they may call off the dogs."

"I hope so," said Jaimeson, a little sleepily. "I am myself alone, here on legitimate business which they, or any one else could be informed of if they took the trouble to inquire. I don't want to be interfered with; but, if they must fight, you can bet I will make it as interesting as I know how."

"All right, pard. If you need a man, come my way and you can get one. I see you are getting sleepy and I won't keep you here a minute longer if you want to go. I know how it is myself. Good-night, if you say so."

Jaimeson was willing enough to say the same, and so the two separated. Chance had brought them together, and there was a possibility it would be some time before they saw the last of each other.

CHAPTER XX.

AN AWFUL CRASH.

It had been a long while since Adam Appleby was as well off as the morning after his game at the Living Light, and it was a little hard for him to make up his mind what to do with himself, now that he was once more a man of comparative means.

The temptation was strong to wait until evening, and then attempt to increase his fortune after the same manner he had made it.

But the Kitten was wise, after her light, and she did not intend to run any such risks. When the gambling fever was on, the wits of her old protector were generally off, and he would bankrupt himself as cheerfully, and make much moan afterward about his wickedness, as though the thing had never happened before.

The fortune in the distance seemed a rather hazy affair, but it would be worth more than all the faro tables in Sunshine if it could be reduced to possession, and there was in addition the undeveloped mining claim, which might pan out large if the old man ever got down to bed rock.

Kitty played them against the faro table, and won.

"And now, see here, grandpa! After what happened last night you don't want all that coin lying around loose in your pockets, nor yet hid away in this old hut, that don't look half as safe, or half as grand, as it did before we knew we were going to be rich. You must put it away where it will be safe."

"Very true, little girl, and so I would like

to; but there is just too much, and just too little. It would be hard to say what I had best do with it, unless I give it to you."

"Oh, ho! That would be worse than ever. Isn't there some such thing as a bank in town? I don't mean one like that at the Living Light; but a place where you can put money in, and then get it out again when you need it."

"There is supposed to be, but there is occasionally a failure that makes the arrangement worse than none at all. There is not the least trouble putting the money in; but sometimes it is not so easy to get it out."

"And what do they do then?"

"Well, in this country, as it is quite a good ways to Canada, they generally hang the cashier. I understand what you are hinting at, and I don't know but what you are right. When evening comes on it would never do to have this money in my pocket, and I will risk the chances of failure or embezzlement before I want to check it out. Come on with me and we will see it put away before I go to work. I must think, and the best way to do that will be to get out of the town. And the mine ought to be looked after, anyhow. Perhaps some one has jumped it while I was too miserable to inquire."

"No, they haven't, for I have been looking after that part myself. I know lots of folks, and I asked them. They just laughed, and said it was all right, and they would see it stayed so. But one thing you don't want to forget. The stage goes out to-morrow, and there must be a letter written. If there is a million back East we don't care much for the hole in the ground, but we'll hang on to it till we are sure there ain't."

"Very true, very true! But I wanted to think a little, to think a little. We were not good friends; and then, if his daughter is living it does not seem right I should have it at all."

"Fudge! It don't take any thinking to tell some one back there you are living, and ready to pay all expenses and take what belongs to you. And when you get it there will be time enough to give it away. You want your share, anyhow; and maybe you wouldn't get even that if you waited too long. And then, don't you see, what would become of me?"

The Kitten was practical; and as for Adam, all that was required for him to see things in the proper light was to have them authoritatively presented. He yielded without further hesitation, and with a lunch in his pocket, he took the girl by the hand, after carefully closing up the shanty, and started out.

There had been a time in the life of Adam Appleby when stationery was plenty, and writing materials were freely used.

That was in the long ago, however, and Adam had not sent a letter away since he had been in Sunshine. The first place he went to was the store in which the post-office was located.

It did not take long to write his letter. With the purchase of the materials he acquired the right to use the counter for a few minutes; and though his hand was a little shaky, and his fingers stiff, he penned the lines without much difficulty. Then he addressed the envelope to the firm who had always had charge of his brother's business, put the stamp on with the usual solemnity, and deposited the letter in the box which was waiting to receive it.

Of course, some time would elapse before he could receive an answer, but the act itself had made a change in his feelings. With such prospects before, he was the more ready to forget what laid behind, and the allurements of the Living Light, and kindred saloons, would hardly have drawn the little capital he had out of his possession. For the present he was beyond the range of temptation.

He still recognized the danger from outsiders. There was no telling what would happen to him or the Kitten. From the post-office he went to the bank.

He looked old and poverty-stricken; but he had some money. The bank had received deposits from such looking customers before, and there was no question about taking his, or agreeing to keep in their safe a paper he gave in with it. Kitty looked on in silence, after taking a quiet, but keen survey of the room and its furnishings. When she went out she shrugged her little shoulders.

"Hum! I don't think that is so much safer than the shanty was when we were there to watch it. If I had all that money I think I would have a better looking place to put it in."

"It is better than it looks," responded Adam, amused, as he always was, at what the Kitten said.

"And there is a man with his revolver inside, at night, even if thieves broke through the iron shutters. Oh, I will find it there safe enough, no doubt. I have arranged it so that if anything happens to me you can get part of it. And if we can find one that suits we will live in a little better house than the old shanty. The wonder is that we have not both died there long ago."

"It is better than nothing, and I am not sure, deed-and-double sure, that we are rich enough to make the change. Better wait till we strike pay-rock. And now, I suppose, we will go out to the mine."

"If you think you can walk that far," answered Adam, eying her a little doubtfully.

"You mean if I can carry you, I guess. I can walk for a year when there is a reason for it; but you do look a little shaky. You must begin to fatten up before we get started for the East. What sort of a place is it, anyhow? I have heard a heap of talk about it, but I don't think I understand much about it."

The chatter went on and beguiled the way, as the child intended it should. A walk of half an hour brought them to the mine.

There was not much to be seen on the surface, for, since Adam Appleby had owned the right and title to the hole in the ground dignified by the appellation of mine, he had not done more work than was necessary to protect his title; and of out-buildings there were none. There was a wrecked windlass lying by the side of the circular opening, and the ends of an old ladder projected a foot or two above the ground. A little heap of ground showed the excavation had not been carried very far.

The Kitten moved as closely as she dared to the brink, and looked down the shaft.

"Don't look like anything but a well, and a not very deep one at that. How far do you think it is to pay-rock?"

"Not so far as some of the fools think who have not observed the lay of the land. It may amount to nothing, but I believe if I had the strength I once had, or the means to hire some one to help me, they would soon be singing a different tune. If I can only hold out there will be thousands in it for you and me, even if I never take out more than the sample of the rock I expect to find. There will be plenty wanting to buy when they see it is a sure thing."

The Kitten rubbed her face, and then peeped slyly around to see how much in earnest her grandfather was. She was so much in the habit of taking a rose-colored view of the worst situations, that she was beginning to suspect the rest of the world of playing the same game.

There was nothing in Adam's face to show he did not mean every word he said, and as he always gathered strength with his encouragement she was careful not to say anything more that might turn his attention to the darker side. Even her limited experience told her it was most likely to be the work of his lifetime for Adam Appleby, unaided, to get to bed-rock.

"That will be the next best thing to getting that million. Now we are here suppose we go to work."

"You go to work? Your little fingers would cramp worse than mine before you had been at it five minutes, and not much would you get done. Still you can go down with me, and we will see what can be done. Perhaps I am strong enough to day to get something accomplished."

"Will I have to climb down all that ladder?" asked the Kitten, looking dubiously at the means of descent.

"Not if you don't want to. I thought perhaps you would like to see what there was at the bottom; but if you can play around here it will be just as well. I will be up again in a few moments. It will not be as lonesome as it is for me when I am here all alone. I sometimes wish there was some one working near, even if I had to share my profits with him. If anything should happen?"

"What can happen?" asked Kitty, brusquely. The idea that she was afraid was not a pleasant one.

"It seems to be forty or fifty feet down there, and your ladder is not of the newest, but if it will hold you I guess it will not break under me. Follow your leader! Here we go!"

Kitty was as quick as the kitten she was facetiously supposed to be. Before Adam could hinder she was on the ladder, and nimbly hurrying down.

If the old man had been content to wait, a catastrophe might have been averted. The child weighed but little, and she was light of foot. He did not think she was in danger and yet he called after her, and when she did not wait he sprung upon the ladder and began a hurried descent. His nerves were not in the best of order or he would not have done so.

Before he had reached the fourth round something happened. There was a crash and a cold lapse.

Adam threw his hands out mechanically, and they touched a stick at the mouth of the shaft. Where his hands touched they hung fast, for fright gave him strength, and the stick, which had once been placed there to rest the ends of the ladder against, offered him a fair hold.

Swinging there he looked downward.

Kitty lay where she had fallen, and it seemed to him that her head was doubled under her, and a fragment of the broken ladder lay across her breast. Even in that moment of frightful suspense Adam could not help the thought flashing across his mind that there had been foul play.

CHAPTER XXI.

JEAN JAIMESON VISITS THE RED DOG.

NOTHING further occurred to disturb the slumbers of Jean Jaimeson, and the next morning, after breakfasting at rather a late hour, he stepped out on the street with as much confi-

dence as though a howling mob had not been in his wake the night before.

The act required no particular courage, since he had received a pretty accurate hint of how the land would lie in the conversation overheard while lurking in the shed. Paddy Porter was probably able to be about by this time, and if he was not, unless he unexpectedly departed this life, there would be no further inquiry as to what had happened at the Living Light. It might not be safe to go down into the lairs of the gang by lamplight, but in the street, and by daylight, there would be no danger.

If he had thought otherwise he would have gone out all the same, though he might have followed a different line. He would hardly have cared to draw attention toward the cabin of the Applebys.

He had promised the old man to see him, and as he was unaware of the events following his visit, thought it more than likely Adam was at home, and under the shelter of what passed with him for a bed.

The hut, however was empty and locked up, so the stroll in that direction was time wasted. It had carried him through the town, however; and he began as leisurely to make his way back. If he intended to visit the mine he would have to make some inquiries as to its location. Having failed to meet Adam at home he intended to keep to the letter of his promise.

If he had only known it, Adam had been gone but a little while when he called at the cabin, and was even then at the post-office, writing the letter which might make such a change in his fortunes. About the time Adam left the post-office Jean was making inquiries at the hotel, and so missed him again. And after all, he left town but a few minutes after the two.

The spot where Adam's mine was located was not hard to find, though it was lonesome enough, and reached by a faint and winding trail. He hurried along for a quarter of an hour, and would doubtless have overtaken the pair had he not met unexpectedly with the last man he expected to see, the veritable Uncle Ezra.

The tramp retained the suit of black obtained from Johnny, the bartender, and his face was clean shaven; but the marks of dissipation and hard times were still to be seen, though he was sober enough.

He was lying on the grass, smoking a short clay pipe; and though Jaimeson perceived the odor of the strong tobacco at a distance, it was not till the last minute he caught sight of the fellow.

There was nothing particularly charming about the meeting. Ezra had been with him in danger the night before, but it was not at all certain that it would not have been better otherwise. He had given Jim Turner a hard rap to enable Ezra to get away, and afterward found the fellow was inclined to push the acquaintance toward the line of goodfellowship, which was a great deal further than Jean wanted it to go.

If it had been possible the young man would have nodded and passed on. It did not suit him at all to be seen conversing with him, especially after such men as Turner and Benham had got the idea into their heads that the tramp was a detective, who had come to Sunshine with the intention of making them his meat.

"Swing lower than ever, pard, fur there's no tellin' who's a-watchin' yer. I'm givin' yer the hint fur nothin', so it ain't no 'xtravagance for you ter be takin' ov it. They've got it in fer yer, big, an' I reckon they'll be after yer ter-night, hot-foot."

"Better save your cautions for yourself, old man. If I remember rightly, they did not have the most amiable intentions about a man of your size and general appearance. I still think it would have been safer if you had taken the advice I gave you last night, and skipped the town."

"Thankee, thankee! But I hev 'importeant bizzness byer, an' I don't leave till it's done. You'r a-playin' right inter my han's, 'thout knowin' how, but I thort I c'rt ter post yer ez ter what sort ov a game you'd be buckin' ag'inst, so you could be a-lookin' out fur number one."

"Oh, I guess I am in no particular danger. The party had some one to pay me a visit last night, and I think the man went away satisfied a mistake had been made."

"Mebbe; but reckon he didn't satisfy ther party ez are behind him, w'ot don't make no mistakes. Ther's a lady in ther case, don'tchersee? An' when they once say a thing they stick to it straight through, right er wrong."

"But what under the sun can the lady have to do with me? I think I had a glimpse of her face, and I will swear that it was strange—one that I had never seen before."

"Don't sw'ar! Ther fish won't bite ary bit better, an' yer may make jest ther biggest kind ov a mistake ter boot. Wy, you can't tell nothin' by looks. She never looks alike in two diff'rent places, an' ef her ower mother war ter see her now she wouldn't know her. An' she thinks she o'rt ter know Oscar Hurd w'en she sees him."

"But I am not Oscar Hurd. She is widely mistaken."

"I know that, but I can't see how that helps ther case. Nothin' but 'xaminin' ther corpus kin convince her, an' that would be too late ter help you much. I don't wantter scare you; but ef I war in your place I'd jest take a bit ov ther advice yer give me, an' skip ther town. Unless, in course, you want a fight. An' ef you do, you'll git all yer barg'in fur, an' a leetle small change throwed in."

"Really, you seem to know a wonderful sight about the party in question. Supposing I did want the fight you speak of, it would not be a bad idea to enlist your services on my side. As a stranger here I would need help, and you look a likely man to have behind one in a scrimmage."

"Might hev a wuss one," responded Uncle Ezra, coolly.

"But I don't git behind, in sich cases. Ef I ain't right alongside, in ther front rank, I ain't nowhar'. An' ez fur knowin' ther woman—I do, you bet. Knowned her w'en she war han'sum an' young, an' know her now, later on, though p'raps she don't know me. An' thar war never anything good about her but her looks, an' her nerve. She hed all both in plenty, an' kin play 'em fur w'ot they're w'u'th. Ef you want ter buck ag'in' 'em, all right. I'll drop a tear at ther fun'ral, an' pass on."

"In the name of Heaven, old man! What are you after? You have not come out here to interview me for nothing, and the sooner you put what you have to say into a shape I can understand, the better it will be."

"Thet's ther way ter talk! Hits me whar I live. Ter git ter bed-rock, I want ter know whether it's her, er me, er some ov ther boys, that ye'r' after. Then I kintell jest w'ot ter do."

"If it will be any satisfaction for you to know it, I am 'after' neither of you, and was not aware of your existence, or hers either, until last night. Let me alone and I can promise that I will not bother either of you."

"Sounds honest, an' I kin b'lieve yer mean it now, though I ain't so sure ov w'ot may happen later on. But ef yer should want ter go fur her, you jest apply ter Onkle Ezry, an' git a p'inter two. An' mebbe you could give me one on Ole Adam. You got mons'r'us thick with him on short notiss, an' I'd give a dollar ter know w'o he really are."

"Ask him and no doubt he will tell you. Now, if you have nothing more to communicate, I will bid you good-morning, and leave you to enjoy your pipe at your leisure."

"Oh, I don't k'er 'nuf about it ter go ter that trouble. Ez ther lady hed hereyes in that d'reshun, I thort maybe we might put two an' two together, an' find out whyso, an' wharfore."

"It appears to me you harp a good deal on the woman in the case. In a general way you seem to know a good deal about her; couldn't you tell me something a little more particular?"

"Oh, you ain't lookin' fur no woman, an' so it ain't no use. Pass on. But w'en you are, kim ter Ezra. That'll be time ernough."

"If you last that long. But after what I heard last night, I would not be at all surprised to hear at any time of your sudden taking off."

"That's ther way it looked, but sence that time I struck a ole pard, thet remembers me afore I war ther present wreck, an' w'ot he says goes 'thout much question. I hed fine fun, an' ef you hed stuck by me you could 'a' bin ez happy as a clam. So long, then, ef yer call that goin'. Sorry ter waste yer time, but I war really mistook, an' thort yer hed a eenterest."

Jean Jaimeson looked thoughtful as he went along, and his steps were a good deal slower than before the meeting.

"If I was a little more certain about that individual himself I would be better able to tell how I ought to talk to him. He is as much a mystery as the woman in the case. It was a confounded bad mistake that was made, if mistake there really was; but I guess I can live through, and it is just possible it will turn out for the best. Can it be that my chance acquaintance with Adam Appleby is at the bottom of the trouble? Scarcely, since I saw the face of the woman before I had spoken a word to the old man. Anyhow, it might be worth while to investigate, and find out who this Madam Mabel really is. Pity it is not safe to ask questions of Ezra. But there is too much likelihood of his being in with the gang to do that."

Once he looked back over his shoulder, and saw the tramp was in the same position, and apparently caring for nothing save the enjoyment of his pipe. If he was there to watch what Jean Jaimeson was doing he certainly took no pains to conceal his presence.

After that a bend in the trail left Ezra no longer in sight; and it was not far to the shaft of the Red Dog. As he glanced in the direction he supposed the mine to be he caught sight of a face turned toward him, so full of horror that he scarcely noted it seemed to be starting from the ground.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL AT FAULT.

JAIMESON was just in time.

The fingers of the old man could not have stood the strain for another moment, and as the

hand of Jean rested on his collar his grip was actually beginning to loosen.

"In the name of all that is good, how did you come to get into such a scrape?"

Jean could guess the answer well enough, but he wanted to help the old man recover his wits and his nerve, and that was the first thing he thought of to say. For a moment he imagined Adam was going to faint entirely away.

"Down the shaft! Look! I cannot."

He pointed feebly with his hand as he spoke, and turned his head away.

"What is the matter now? You don't mean to say—"

"Kitty!" gasped the old man, feebly.

"Ah!"

Jaimeson said no more. He understood, and though it was a shock to unnerve him if anything would, he stooped and peered anxiously down the opening.

Kitty still lay there just as Adam had seen her, except that Jean could see her face. He was not sure of it, but it seemed that her cheek had the hue of death. The fragment of the ladder still lay across her breast.

"You see her? Is—is she dead?"

Adam crept to his side, and asked the question in the lowest of whispers.

"I see her, yes. But perhaps she is not so badly hurt. How did it happen, and how long has she been lying there?"

"The ladder broke under her weight, and it has stood mine, and a weight twice hers besides, hundreds of times. I would have fallen too if I had not caught to the stick as I went, without knowing what I did. Listen! Can you hear a sound? Kitty! Kitty!"

Still unwilling to look at the sight below, the old man placed his mouth to the edge of the shaft, and feebly shouted downward.

"No use to waste time doing that. How long ago do you say this happened?"

"It could not have been long ago, though it seems to have been an age. Perhaps she is not dead, but she looked so like it; and if she was not, surely she would answer Gran'pa Adam."

"Never mind that, now. The first thing to do is to get her out. Have you no rope here long enough to reach there? I could climb down. No use for you to try anything, you are too much unstrung."

"No. No rope. Nothing at all since the ladder has broken. I had a rope but I sold it when I was sick. There is nothing of the kind nearer than Sunshine."

"Then stay here and watch, and I will go for one. If that bummer is where I left him he may be of some good. I will run all the way, and be back as soon as I can. Keep up your courage, and if she says anything tell her it will not be long until we can help her."

Some little explanation he felt he must give the old man, precious though the moments might be. Without waiting for answer he pulled himself together, and set off at a rapid lop along the trail by which he had just come. He took it for granted Adam knew what he was saying when he declared there was no rope nearer than Sunshine, and he intended to waste no time in getting there.

As he neared the spot where he had left Uncle Ezra he looked around for him, but the tramp was no longer to be seen. He could not have remained long after Jaimeson parted from him, or he would still have been in sight.

"All right!" thought Jean. "I don't know that he could have been of any good, unless it would have been to watch the old man, and see that he didn't throw himself over the brink. I would have had to go anyhow, since Ezra is not built after the model of a runner, and would have been out of breath before he had gone half a mile. Besides, I doubt if he could make things fly around as lively as they ought to. There must be no delay about getting back. And as I ought to have my second wind by this time I had better be putting on a little spurt. Half the town will probably come back with me, but I don't see how that is to be helped."

As the young man was a runner of the first quality, and was doing his best, the journey to Sunshine did not take long, and there was little delay after he got there.

"Seventy-five feet of inch-rope, and charge what you like for that or a hundred, so that you reel it off like lightning! There has been an accident at old man Appleby's claim, and his little girl is lying at the bottom of the shaft."

It happened the proprietor of the store into which he dashed was well acquainted with the two, and had a strong liking for the Kitten.

He wasted no time in asking questions, but ran off the rope as rapidly as though he thought his own life depended on it.

"There's your rope; plenty to reach to the bottom of the hole the old man calls his mine. And yonder is Steve Allen with his cayuse. Better give it to him to take out, and the rest of us will follow on foot. He will get there before we do, and can't do much till we come, but there will be time saved. Weight to carry makes it go slower. Here, Steve!"

And before Jaimeson's breathing had moderated to its normal state, Steve, with the rope coiled and swinging at his side, was off at the dead run for the Red Dog.

Jean Jaimeson and a dozen more followed as fast as their feet could carry them, and it was not long before they came in sight of the mouth of the shaft, with Allen looking down into its depths.

"Hyer's yer shaft, an' down thar's yer bu'sted ladder; but blame my hide ef I kin see anything ov old Adam, er ther leetle gal!"

Such was the salutation of Steve Allen as they came panting to the rescue; and Jaimeson stared blankly around as he realized the fact of the mysterious disappearance.

There was no sign that any one had been there during his absence, and it was certain Adam could not have got the child up without assistance. What, then, had become of the pair?

"Su'thin' happened, that's a sure thing. Guess ther best plan 'd be to let ther rope down, an' some one go take a look around below. There's a bit of a drift that they might be hidin' in."

"Try it, by all means; but I am sure you will not find them there. Adam was here when I left him, and he could not have got down without a bigger jump than he could make and save bones enough to crawl away with; to say nothing of totting the child. But it seems strange that if any one came to his aid they should not be in sight. It was as near to Sunshine as to any other place to which they would take the child, and we followed the best road. If they had been going that way we would have met them. I wonder if Ezra could have found them?"

Still, there was a chance that in some mad way Adam had made the descent, and moved the body of the child. It was worth while to investigate before looking elsewhere.

Down went the rope, with half a dozen or more hands holding on to the end of it; and down went Steve Allen. He disappeared from sight, but was soon back again at the foot of the shaft.

"Hold hard, thar: I'm coming up. Thar's nothin' ter be seen hyer."

"Look around a little, and see if there is any sign below there, of how she was taken away. It has been done, and if we knew how, it would give a better show for finding which way she was taken."

So Jaimeson called down, and Steve did halt for a moment or so, scanning the ground closely, but without result.

"No sign hyer; up we go! An' don't you felers that spread over ther ground too much tell I git a sight ov it. Thar ort ter be a trail leadin' somewhar, an' I reckon we're men enough ter find it."

Jaimeson had already given a glance or so around in search of any footprints that might have been made in the softer ground near the mouth of the shaft. While Steve Allen was ascending he was searching more narrowly, but without a different result. He fancied he could find the tracks of Adam and his granddaughter as they approached; but there was no trace, as far as he could discover, of how, or in which direction, they went away.

Steve Allen was equally at fault, though he was known to be an experienced hand at tracking. After five minutes spent in looking around they were as much at fault as ever.

"Kinder queer, this hyer," said Allen, pausing and scratching his head.

"Ef they war in a hurry ter git ther girl out, an' things war in sich shape ez hez bin reported, I don't reckon they would hav spent much time trying ter kiver up their tracks. An', unless they did, thar would hev bin some sign. Let me see! Yer said s'uthin' about a tramp bein' round. Yer think thar war any chance ov him havin' a hand in ther pie?"

"There is a chance, though I did not think it likely. He had disappeared, when I passed, on my way to town, the spot where I had left him but a few moments before. If he had gone toward the mine I should have met him."

"No tellin', ef he war u-layin' low. I can't see whar his interest would come in, but strange things are a-happennin', an' it might be w'uth while ter see whar he went to. Billy Birch, do yer think you are man enough ter take his trail, ef it's not more nor ord'narily hard?"

"I reckon," said the man addressed.

"You put me at one end ov it, and I'll show the other afore I git done."

"This gent will show it to you, then; an' I'll take a leetle more time hyer. When yer can't find a trail there are on'y one way outen ther mix, an' that are to follow it jest whar yer couldn't see if it she war thar. Then, sooner or later, thar are bound ter be a slip, an' yer strikes it whar yer won't lose it. I think I kin see ther way cl'r."

While he was searching around for the best route that such a supposition would indicate, Jaimeson, Birch, and one or two more, went off to the spot where Uncle Ezra had been lying. There was no effort here to hide any tracks, and Birch struck the trail by which he departed without difficulty or delay. It seemed, at first, as though he was taking his way to Sunrise.

Before he had gone far, he had halted, however. The blurred marks made by his feet showed where he had been looking and listening for a little, and then he struck off in a new

direction, and one which might bring him in sight of the Red Dog if followed sufficiently far.

"Looks ez though we got it this time; but it won't do to be too sure. Pears as though he either saw or heard something that he thought worth while to foller up. Maybe he heard the old man yellin', an' prehaps he saw some one slinkin' that way and wanted to get onto what was up. We'll go see which it was."

That, however, was easier said than done. The trail was plain enough for a little, but it soon grew fainter, as though Ezra had begun to step lighter; and then it vanished altogether when a bit of ground was reached on which it was easy to be lost.

"Looks as though he was onto something, but what, is more than I can tell. We'll strike straight for the old man's claim, and see if he don't turn up somewhere there. If we don't hit him maybe Steve will."

Steve had made no great progress in spite of his theory. When they came in sight of the mouth of the shaft he was still beating the ground in a dogged but unprofitable way, and the two parties came together without having discovered anything in the mean time, save that Ezra probably knew the rights of things, if he could only be found. Whether he had a hand in raising the child from the shaft, or whether he only had seen those who did, was a matter of conjecture; and the balance of opinion inclined to the latter view.

"Well, gents, maybe thar's nothin' in ther durned thing, but it's a puzzle that hits me whar I live, an' I don't keer ter give it up tell I know ther rights of it. There's a smart chance ter range 'round through all out-doors, fur thar are three p'ints ov ther compass they might 'a' gone to, an' mebbe four. I've listed fur ther war, howsowever, an' I'll know more 'bout it ef it takes all day. Ef Billy an' one er two others 'll back me, ther rest may ez well go back ter bizziness, an' we'll let yer know what we find out. Too many hands 'round 'll only make bad work."

There was much sense in this last opinion, and so those who fancied they had not the time to spare, drew off and left the others to hunt for the missing trail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PADDY PORTER TAKES HIS DOSE.

EXCEPT to those who got interested when Jean Jaimeson went for a rope, the disappearance of Adam Appleby and the girl known as his granddaughter did not cause any wide-spread excitement.

A man and a child had been hurt in a mine. That was about the substance of it, and such accidents were too common to excite any particular remark, except when specially brought to the notice of the public.

The day passed without anything more definite. Jaimeson returned with the larger share of the party. Being a stranger to the neighborhood he had a good excuse to retire from the quest after having explained his casual interest in the lost pair. Toward night, Steve Allen and the rest came also.

They were tired with a fruitless quest in the hills, and in no particularly good humor with themselves and the rest of the world. If they had met Jaimeson before supper had been discussed they might have said something intended to hurt his feelings, if they did not go so far as to hurt his body. They had gone out with the best intentions, expecting to play the part of benefactors, and had been able to find nothing except a broken ladder, and a few straggling footprints, supposed to belong to a worthless old tramp—or somebody a little worse.

Nevertheless, the news spread, and with more or less interest was heard by nearly every one in Sunrise. It furnished a subject for a little desultory conversation here and there, and there were a few men who, among themselves, spoke a little more seriously than the rest. But there was a special reason for that.

Uncle Ezra had disappeared likewise; and for the reason there were different opinions.

Some thought he had carted the two away bodily; and here again, there was a conflict of beliefs. It might be he was nursing up the wounded; but there were more who supposed he had some felonious intention. Some one suggested the idea that he intended to jump the Red Dog, and was urged to the course from having found out there was a regular bonanza at the bottom of the shaft.

This latter idea caused the first real excitement since Jaimeson's demand for a rope. Half a dozen men would have been on the way to investigate the truth of the suggestion if others had not laughed them out of it. It takes very little to start a rush; and if these men had gone they would have done so prepared to remain if there was anything worth the holding.

Tom Benham and some others had their own opinions.

"Dog-gone it! We don't know anything more about his game than we did in the start, but whatever it is it is a deep one. It may look our way and it may not; but it would have been just as well not to have run any risks."

"Can't see that we could have done any better than we did. He has the luck of the Old Boy."

"You're right. Twice I thought I had him lined. If it had been any one else I would have sworn he was a dead man; and a minute later I was thinking it was all up with me. What in blazes did Nip want to take up with him for? Does he mean to sell us out?"

"Don't you worry yourself about Nip. He never goes back on a pard. That's what's the matter. He swears you're away off; and that the fellow is an old side pard of his—Limber Luke by name, when he knew him. He may have a dozen other names for all that he knows, but Double-Cinch Dan is not one of them. And Nip is no fool."

"No fool unless it is being mixed up with a lot of us without knowing all that is going on. Unless he is so far behind the scenes that we can't see him when he stands there I don't see so broadly where his profit comes in at."

"Don't ask odd questions and you won't be so apt to bear whopping big lies. Nip knows what he is about, and it's no business of ours as long as we are satisfied with the big money we have been making. I am more concerned to know how the man we think is Double-Cinch Dan got out of town without Spider Billy seeing him go."

"We'll find out after a while. It's a pretty clear thing that he, Jaimeson, and the old man are all on the same racket."

"Not so very sure. If it is, then it is Bloom, and his gang of road-agents they are after. That would let us out, and the less we bothered the better it would be. It's a confounded mixed-up case, and one don't know how to move."

"Then, wait for orders. I reckon there will be no work done while he is around the town."

"Not so sure again. As you say, wait for orders and you will find out. I have said my say and run my risks. Now I am going to take it easy."

"Hope you may get the chance; but if we are not ordered on the war trail again I will be a mighty badly mistaken man. There was a lull last night, after the flare-up, but I feel it in my bones that if it is once certain Dan Garland is not on the carpet, the other matter will go on."

"Yes; but it takes such a long while to find out. It wouldn't be the correct thing to ask us to do a job of that kind with Double-Cinch Dan looking on. He would be obliged to snatch us whether he wanted to or not, and if he must be boosted over the range, of course I am on hand when called for, though I would just as soon some one else had the job under the circumstances. There is too much of a muckness about asking us to clean them both up, without settling that Dan is to go first."

So, from their conversation it could be seen the two were pretty much at sea in regard to Uncle Ezra, and were without definite orders concerning Jean Jaimeson.

They were seated together at one of the tables at the Living Light, talking in a low tone. As it was early in the evening there were but few patrons in the room, and there was little danger of being overheard. Nip Allison came strolling their way.

"Been to see Paddy this evening?"

Allison looked at Benham as he spoke, and it was he who answered:

"Not yet. Guess he is all right. Thought he would be around strong as ever to-night. If he's not, suppose I ought to bunt him up. That little barking he got ought not to put him off his feed for more than a day."

"Well, I saw the doctor on the street a bit ago, and she said he was not doing as well as would be expected, and wanted to send around a fresh batch of medicine. Said, if any of the boys were going that way, they should drop in on the road and get the stuff. Might as well be you as any one else. Think Porter would like to see you."

"All right, I'm going now, before the fun opens. It would be queer if he should make a die of it yet."

Benham rose as he spoke. He understood the message well enough. He was needed at the office of Doctor Mabel more than at the bedside of Paddy Porter.

"Hang around here, pard, and I'll see you later," he added, by way of leave-taking, and Turner nodded as though he understood.

It was not far to the office of the doctor.

Benham looked curiously at the tall, handsome, though rather masculine-looking woman who motioned him to a chair.

"Bad thing about Porter," she said, brusquely, as he sunk into his seat.

"I advised against his being moved, but he woul have it so. Now, he is on his back, worse than ever. Believe there is some one with him, but that is no reason why you should not look in and see how things are going. I will be there myself about nine."

"All right! Nip told me yon had some medicine you wanted to send around. Shall I take any of the boys with me?"

"No, no! You might speak to one or two of them, who, you are sure, can be trusted, and see if they will sit up in case they are needed, but unless they are, they had better stay away. We don't want an Irish wake around his bed-side—not, at least, until he is a sure-enough corpse."

It is strange how an apparently trifling injury will sometimes get the better of the strongest man. He must have been all out of gear, or things would never have gone as they have done."

While talking, Doctor Mabel was putting up a prescription, which she finally handed to Benham.

The latter understood the appointment, and went off without seeking for further explanation.

"Mighty convenient thing," he thought, "to have a patient like Paddy. All the world can gather at his shanty and the rest of mankind be none the wiser. But I'd hate to be the patient if it is straight goods she was giving me. There is something more than that touch on the head keeping Paddy in bed, if he is really not able to travel the rounds. I'll see what he looks like when I get there."

Although Tom Benham had never made a reputation as a nurse, there was nothing odd about his ready acquiescence in the doctor's orders. Any one who might have heard them would have admitted that he would have obeyed them had they been addressed to him. In Sunshine the doctor had a way of doing as she pleased with the people when it came to a matter of the care of her patients. When she said go, they usually went.

Nevertheless, if Paddy was actually waiting for his medicine, the doctor had gained no time sending it by Benham, since the latter did not turn his steps toward the cabin of the wounded man until his watch showed it to be near to nine o'clock.

He found Nancy Gross there, on guard, and Paddy was sleeping in the same unnatural way he had done the night before, when occupying the bed in the basement at the Light.

"Doc left orders ter give him a powder in whisky, 'long erbout this time in ther evenin'. He took it all right, an' he's sleepin' like a leetle lam'. You goin' ter stay all night?"

"That depends, Neddy, that depends. We'll know better when the doctor comes. Sorry Porter's not awake, for I wanted to ask him how he felt; but I suppose it's all right. Don't bother with talking, you'll get enough of that by and by."

Neddy uttered a growl of discontent, and fell back.

Promptly at nine the doctor came gliding in. She went to the bedside at once, and felt the pulse of the wounded man, noting also, with the air of an expert, all the other items that a doctor would be apt to look after. There was no question about her skill as both surgeon and physician. Before she was done the door opened, and Chet D'Aubegne came also.

"You're here, are you? It is time."

The doctor spoke sharply, and her keen eyes were piercing him through and through.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A COUNCIL OF THE PLOTTERS.

D'AUBEGNE accepted the salutation without immediate response. He gave a careless glance in the direction of Neddy Gross, and then, passing on to the side of the bed, bent over the sleeping man with a solicitude those who knew the parson best would scarcely have supposed him capable of showing.

"Oh, he is doing well enough, now, if the fever does not rise again. Mr. Gross has been watching with him for some time, and I think desires to be relieved. Benham can stay for a little, and perhaps some one else could be found for the balance of the night. You might try it and see."

"Ef Tom will hold on hyer a bit, I think I kin make it all right. An' it ain't that I'm tired ov ther watch, but that I've got a contract on my own hook, now. After last night I've got to get even, er ther boys'll laugh me out ov town."

"I understand, and that is why I made the suggestion. But look out for your scalp. From what I hear the old fellow was only playing with you last night. And you never heard of a man who had been a side pard of Nip's who turned out to be a slouch. Look out for your precious life; and if you want to be a chief in Sunshine, make no more blunders."

The doctor spoke with a bluff, brusque way that was just the thing to go with Neddy, much as he might have resented it coming from one of his own sex. He muttered something about the merry time to occur when he met the tramp, and glided out of the room, glad to get away, though he would have remained quietly enough if Benham had given the order.

When he was gone the expression of D'Aubegne changed. He advanced toward the doctor, holding out his hand, which she took in not the most cordial of manners.

"It is all right with Tom, here, of course, but Gross may as well remain in the dark, and it would have been well if you had got rid of him before I came. I might as well call around at the office and be done with it."

"Don't worry yourself about Gross. He is solid to tie to in any event, and Benham has the whip hand so thoroughly, he would not dare to open his mouth, even if he saw there was money

in it. And it was necessary we had a conference immediately. It may be Gross will be needed before the night is over, for it seems to me, if everything has gone right to-day, there is no time to be lost in finishing up the business we have been having on hand, so we can be ready to turn our attention to the latest thing developed."

"Then, you mean to go ahead with the affair?"

"Certainly; and since we know Dan Garland has an eye on Sunshine, even if not here yet, the sooner it is done the better. If he is Uncle Ezra, as Tom still seems to think, there is no time like the present, while he is out of town."

"But can those reports be relied on? The man has an uncomfortable habit of turning up where and when he is least expected. I swear! I thought the thing would be off till he was gone for good, or had turned his toes up to the daisies."

"We can't afford to waste time. The chance to corral fifty thousand don't generally stay open more than a few days, and there is no telling how soon it will close. We know it has not done so thus far, but there is a stage out to-morrow, and it may take the boodle out, and we none the wiser."

"If it should fall into the hands of Captain Bloom, I can't see the parties would be any better off. If I am not mistaken, that is the way they figure it out themselves. If it had not been for the risk, I suspect the bonds would have been sent out before this."

"Hush-h-h! Don't mention any articles. Little birds might carry the words. It is a stake worth playing for; and we must have something like a capital to begin with if we want to open a campaign to capture that million. Dan Garland, or Dan Garland's aid, whichever he may be, will be looked after to-night. If he don't turn up in a day or so, you may be sure the fact will be understood at his headquarters, and some one sent down to look after him. That might interfere with the work; and I assure you, after the time spent in watching and waiting, I do not intend to lose sight of that fifty thousand until my share is in my pocket."

"Then you know that he is provided for?"

"Am as certain as I can be about a thing I have not done myself. I doubt if he or the Applebys will trouble the town very soon again. But that is settled now. There are several other things I wanted to speak with you about. Before he went out to his claim the old man sent a letter. At least, he placed it in the post-office. He also went to the bank, and deposited what money he had—which I understand he won last night at Nip's faro table, possibly with the connivance of the dealer, who seems to be none other than Benham's detective."

"Not any more than yours," interposed Benham, not altogether satisfied with the aspersion that might be only half concealed in the words.

"I had orders to look out for Dan Garland in disguise, and if I thought I found him, a better man might have been fooled the same way. Nip ought to know of what he talked, and we know he is sound as a dollar; but Garland could fool Satan himself, and thereto may be some mistake about the way he recollects things."

"Don't feel hurt, old man," hastily put in D'Aubegne.

"We are still inclined to think he is a detective, even if not Dan. How he managed to deceive Nip is none of our business. The man was worth the watching. Certain it is, there was something mighty queer about the way the strangers all took to one another, and it ought to mean something."

"That's so," said Benham, ready to be appeased.

"I wouldn't have been half as sure if it had not been for the luck he had. I thought I had him lined twice over; and it seemed that no one else but Dan Garland could have got away after such a fine style."

"The third time is a charm," went on the doctor, unruffled by the interruptions.

"And I have reason to believe the third time has been tried. But that has nothing to do with Appleby's presence at the bank. In addition to the money, he left there for safe keeping a paper which would be worth our having if I am not wide off. It may not have been of importance, but I understand it had the appearance of having been carried for some time, and I am inclined to think it was his will. It is not likely any one else knows its contents, and I would be glad to know what it says before it is filed for probate. If Adam and his grandchild are both dead, or dying, the next of kin might find it to be of interest to him or her. I really must have the papers."

She spoke in a reflective tone, but her eyes were fixed on Benham, as if through him the solution to the difficulty was to be reached.

"There is such a thing as having too many irons in the fire," was his prompt answer. "The same man or men ought not to take care of the whole outfit. At the same time, it might be done, and the risks all be with me. How much do you consider those papers worth?"

"A thousand," responded the doctor promptly. The question was one she had been expecting, and she was prepared with her answer.

"A thousand goes. I can get a man who will never leak to manage the post-office, and will attend to the bank myself, as I ought to, under the circumstances. The only extra work about it is the letter, and any fool can get that."

"Looks like it, but you don't want to make any mistakes about the fool. If he should be pinched, and squeal, it would mean trouble for you, and a heap sight of it for us. It is not in my line or I would say I would undertake it myself."

"Don't worry about that part of the job. I'd like to know what use the Saints are if they can't be trusted in the rudiments. If I didn't need him to help me I would have Turner go through the place for all that is in it. It's a pity Porter is not around, for he would be the man for the occasion. But the others are almost as good. I suppose the business with Jaimeson is off for the present."

"As far as you are concerned, yes. I was hasty last night, and so missed the mark altogether. With the detective missing he will wait. Meantime I will consider the best plan to deal with him. He might not have known I was here, after all."

"Unfortunate, then, if you have given yourself away," said D'Aubegne.

"If you had been content to wait until you had taken counsel, things would have been easier to shape. As it is, I do not think he will give you further trouble. Pity the same mysterious fate could not have overtaken him that seems to have happened to the Applebys. I suppose lightning will not strike twice in the same place, and it does not do to leave everything to luck."

"Luck!" exclaimed the doctor, with an accent of scorn.

"All the luck there is about such things requires a deal of hard labor to get it started, and the streak would stop quickly enough if the work did, too. If we could only have kept them all apart, things would have gone right enough, in spite of the first failures. If anything, luck has been dead against us, since it brought them together."

"I can't say that I understand," said Chet, quietly.

"And it is not necessary you should, you old goose," retorted the doctor, not willing he should pursue the subject further.

"Better stick to the business you are to do. Your part of the work has not yet been opened out. When it is I will let you know."

From the way the doctor talked it was plain she was the head, and Benham was the executive officer. What part Chet played was not so easy to discover; but then, a man like he was could point to his reputation and be excused from the drudgery of the profession it was pretty certain the three belonged to.

"All right! I generally get into the thick of it, sooner or later. If Tom is going to see the men needed for the work, he had better do it at once, so it will be certain they will have their heads clear. And if Gross is to be in the expedition, and you are going to keep this farce up, he had better look around for some one to take his place. I will stay until he comes back, and perhaps by that time the point will be settled as to what time the diversions are to take place."

"Never mind about the details. They have been talked over so often they all ought to be second nature. Three o'clock was the hour settled on, for the reasons you have heard long ago. There will be no change in the programme, so far as I can see. Your suggestion is a good one, though. Tom had better be off."

"Off goes. If you can make it sure Paddy won't be tumbling around, waiting to hear the clocks strike, it wouldn't be a bad scheme for Neddy and myself to keep watch here all night. We could slide off for an hour, and be back without any one suspecting us."

"Go then," said the doctor, motioning toward the door.

"You are responsible for leakage or treachery, though I doubt if there will be any. Good-by, if you are actually off."

CHAPTER XXV.

CHEP D'AUBEGNE UNBOSOMS HIMSELF.

LEFT together the doctor and Chet D'Aubegne looked at each other.

"Will the time never come when we can see each other without some such miserable excuse as this? Paddy Porter, to be sure, has been a convenience, and I suspect that if he ever knows just how he has been worked there will be blood in his eye; but such subterfuges are enough to make a man want to hang himself and be done with it. How long must this thing be kept up?"

"What thing?" asked the doctor, coolly.

"I thought all was progressing too favorably to desire a change; but if you are not satisfied, express yourself more plainly."

"Pshaw, Mabel! You understand me well enough. We do not seem to be any nearer than we were a month ago; and life is terribly uncertain. You have managed to give reasons for

keeping me at arm's length; but I am sick of it all."

"Sick also of the prospect for your share of the million?"

"Confound the million! It is that which makes me nervous. At first it seemed too good to be true; now it rather appears too true to be good. I begin to fear that it will stand between us. That the day will come when you will say you have no further need of me, and will quietly dump me overboard."

"Careful, you! That may mean a good deal more than appears on the surface. If I thought it did I am not sure but what I would say goodbye, and leave you to run your own schemes. Whatever I may have been to my victims—you see, I speak plainly, and call things by their right names—with you I have been open as the day, and as honest as honest could be. I have told you I cared for you—how much and why are mysteries, even to myself. If you intend to express a doubt perhaps I can pardon you; but a fear is a sin beyond mercy."

"Gracious heavens! If you think I can fear anything in heavens or earth it goes to show how broadly an intimate can be mistaken. I may be cautious at times, but I assure you, a doubt of my personal safety in a matter of life and death never troubled my head in my life. Least of all would it bother me when you were concerned. But I cannot always be a man of ice, and sooner or later I may plead too strongly, and weary you past remedy. You think you care for me now; and are waiting to be sure. My only fear is that the time will never come."

"I can make some allowance for that feeling," responded the doctor, her face softening somewhat.

"Indeed, when I consider the matter over I am inclined to wonder that Chet D'Aubegne should prove as tractable as he has. I am not sure—not really sure—that I might not be willing to say, confound the million, myself. I would rather know you were constant for myself, such as I am, than ever have a glimmering suspicion there was coin at the bottom of the affection you say you feel. I wish I cared for you a little less, or a great deal more."

"I am afraid I do not understand you. I can see by your face you are trying to give me some sort of encouragement; but it strikes me it is rather a douche of cold comfort, and I have begun to shiver under it already. If you loved me a little less?"

"Then I would not feel as though I was committing an assassination when I drag you through the schemes we have talked over, and have already on foot. And if a little more I might be willing to forego them altogether, and take a slower, but perhaps a surer route. There is such a thing as a failure in the midst of success; and how can we know we will not meet it just when it will bear the hardest on you and me?"

"For your sake I might be willing to say the same did I not know that neither of us could ever by any chance be willing to wait, with the uncertainty of success stirring us in the face. This way we have all the wages and benefits of victory as we go along, and knowing ourselves as we do there is no use for a thought of possible failure at the end. All I ask is to have this period of probation shortened; this infernal waiting to come to an end."

There could be no question about the earnestness of the parson. He was talking as no one in Sunshine, save Doctor Mabel, had ever heard him talk, and though he put a certain amount of repression in his speech, his face showed for once at least that there was more flesh and blood than stone in the composition of Chet D'Aubegne.

"Be patient a little longer. I am hardly worth the winning—though I would not say that much to any other living person. The task is perhaps too great for the prize. And yet—forgive me, dear,—we might not be so badly mated. There should be no deception here. We each know the other, without glamour or school-child nonsense. We can be of profit without a doubt, and while neither of us are paupers we can see sufficient in the future to be loyal—for a time at least. And yet—wait a little longer! We are not out of Sunshine yet, and until we are it would be better for us to remain as we are, friends, pards if you will, but nothing more. I do not know why it is, but I have a presentiment that if the world here knows there is anything between us two there will be an explosion which will wreck us both."

"I'd sooner risk the explosion than have things go on at this arm's length gait much longer. It has been a mighty long time since I told any other woman I loved her; and I didn't more than a quarter believe it then. This time I am in earnest; and when I am in earnest the hardest thing in the world for me to do is to wait. Don't try me too hard; and don't trifling at all. I can take a square 'no' like a little man; but—I will say no more until this venture is over. Then, it will be time to end this lonely waiting."

"Yes! Then, it will be time to end it. I give you my word, and you know you can rely on that."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and there

was a suspicion of a flush on her face that made the parson shut his teeth hard to keep back the words he wanted to utter.

He was sure he could win, when he saw the glow on her cheeks, if he kept his head. But to anger her now might mean total loss. When she was in this mood she was doubly on her guard, and no pleading or passion could ever make her swerve from the path which she had marked out for herself to tread. She had gone with him now as far as the limit. To urge her further might even make her turn to rend him.

And Chet D'Aubegne was very much in earnest about this beautiful woman.

"Be it as you wish. It was something more than chance brought us together; and it will take more than fate to wrench us apart. I can wait a little longer if you do not chill me, meantime, with your coldness. But once out of Sunshine—and that day must not be too long in coming—and the world must know you as my wife. After what I have told you I am certain you cannot suspect me of anything but the truest motives. And if you say so, I will drop all, and go to-night. You can have your own way in everything. I'll take poverty and the square if it must be so, cheerfully enough, so they are shared with you. I will vouch for my own enjoyment of them, if you can say as much for yourself."

The doctor slid her hand out of the parson's, laughing lightly, as she drew back a step or so and looked him in the face.

"I don't doubt your earnestness, my friend, so there is no need for any rash promises. It seemed a little odd for you and I to be going back to our school days, and yet I don't say I did not like it. Drop all that, now. You have had your say, and received your answer. We will finish the business on hand, and then, if good fortune attends us, we will go back with our profits, and look after that larger fortune, without which, I am afraid it would be risky to attempt to settle back into the humdrum life you have been hinting at. We will not be absolutely poor with a million. For the present, I have only one regret."

"And that?"

"The information Mr. Benham possesses in regard to our affairs. It was necessary, perhaps; but none the less an evil. He is square enough no doubt, yet, I confess, the thought of him in connection with the future is uncomfortable. If I had not lost my head I should never have allowed him to understand the drift of the Appleby matter. With manners not at all unprepossessing he is nothing but the ordinary burglar and thug, after all. He may give us trouble hereafter, though stanch enough now."

"Time enough to consider that when we are done using him. At present we could not do without him as a go-between, and you must acknowledge he has served us well in the past. Let the future take care of itself, so far as he is concerned. There is always the chance some weary pilgrim will object to his methods and let the drop on him before he sees the danger. He is fond of getting other men to the front, but at the same time he takes chances enough in all conscience to make his insurance risk particularly shaky. Twice last night I thought he was elected. If Nip had dreamed who fired the shot which came so near taking him off there would have been dead Benham on the floor."

"Or dead Allison. The rascal has a quick eye and hand, and the luck of the old boy to boot. But some day the latter may run out. I suppose there is nothing to do but to wait and see."

And then these two virtuous and highly practical lovers began to discuss the schemes on foot, never once finding it necessary to look at the sleeping Porter. There was much said, but there was more that might have astonished the parson had the doctor chosen to mention it. They were still talking in low tones when Benham came back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TROUBLE WITH ADAM.

FROM the moment Adam Appleby and the Kitten left Sunshine they were watched, little as they suspected the fact. Had it not been for the coming of Jean Jaimeson it is possible the catastrophe at the shaft would not have happened.

It was impossible, however, to approach the old man without being seen by the other, and so, while waiting for Jaimeson to come within reaching distance the Kitten darted down the ladder, her grandfather followed, and the rest, as already chronicled, occurred.

Allen had hit the truth exactly when he said the proper place to look for the trail was just where it could not be found. When he began his search it was over the very ground by which four men approached the Red Dog the moment Jean was fairly out of sight. That they had not come sooner was fortunate for the young man, but the fact was they were not at all anxious to do more than they had bargained to do; and they wanted to leave no traces of their late presence when once they were gone. If it had been

necessary to take in Jaimeson they would have done so without fear or remorse; but as it seemed that could be avoided by a little patience, they possessed their souls with a sufficient stock of it to last them until the intruder, of whose name and importance they were profoundly ignorant, should be out of the way.

When he was once out of sight the four acted with promptness and dispatch.

"Step ez light now ez though you war travelin' on ails," said the one who acted as the leader of the expedition.

"Nulty, you stay hyar on ther watch, an' see that no one gits a sight of us, an' ther rest folle me. Thar's been suthin' rotten, an' I wouldn't be skeered ef I found thar war a corpus to tote. The old man looks all broke up, but the young galoot means biz, an' ther way he's steppin' out it won't be long afore he strikes Sunshine. Git a keerful move on, an' then make tracks ez hez no heels to 'em."

The speaker saw Appleby was in no condition to exercise caution or to note who it was coming to his side. All that he feared was pursuit; and not so much that as the discovery of the direction in which the trail was to lie. The feet of every man were well muffled, and the three stepped with care. Before Adam was aware of their presence a hand, by no means gentle or light, was laid on his shoulder.

"What's wrong hyar, ole man?" grumbled a rough voice in his ear.

"Yer seems ter be in a heap sight ov trouble; mebbe we kin help yer out."

"Most any voice was welcome just then. Adam ceased to wring his hands.

"Ah, help at last! Bless you for saying so. She is not—she cannot be dead. I think I saw her move but a minute ago. Have you ropes? Have you a ladder? Is there no way to reach her? I would have thrown myself down before this if I had not felt that she must live; and what would she have been without me?"

"Level ez a die, ole man. Stick ter that platform. She ain't even hurt, an' whén we lift that ladder off you kin jest look ter see her come a-climb'in' up ov her own sweet self. Stan' aside a bit. Me an' my pards'll manage it, and take keer ov yer both tell yer are able ter travel. That's it. Tie one end, so that slips won't count too biame big, an' we'll see how things are."

It had required but a glance for the party to see what had happened. They were ready for something of the kind, and had thought out a probable course of action. Fortunately, one of the men carried a sixty-foot rope, brought along with the idea that perhaps it might be necessary to have a means of reaching the bottom of the shaft. This was brought into use.

With one end fastened to the stick which had saved Adam, the other was dropped into the pit, and almost before it had touched the bottom, the leader was sliding down.

Without delay he threw aside the fragments of the ladder, and lifted the child, with one hand feeling her heart, and for an instant seeming uncertain whether he found any sign of life to reward the careful searchings of his fingers.

Then he looked upward.

"It's all right. She's bin shoochen up from A to Ampersand, but she's comin' 'round a-hummin'. Look out fur her, up thar! Er, say, mebbe it would be jest ez well ter take keer ov number one, first off. See that ther stick don't slip, an' I'll be with yer in a minnit."

He carefully knotted the rope under the arms of the Kitten. He was pretty sure the two men above could not well draw them both up; and just as certain he could not climb the rope with the child on his arm, or over his shoulder, without more exertion than he cared to make.

"It may brooze her up a bit, but she'll hev ter run her chances. They'd be sure ter drop us both ef we tried 'em tergether, an' I wouldn't keer ter risk it alone. An' ef ther gal went fust, that's no tellin' wot might happen ter me. I kin make a heap sight better foul ov it 'bove ground in case that young cove gits back."

So thinking, he left Kitty lying on the floor of the shaft, and began a hurried hand-over-hand ascent, which soon brought him to the top.

"Now raise her gently, pards, an' be keerful she don't git a swing on. Her heart's a-beatin'—a leetle low, p'raps, but it's got ther reg'lar swing to it, an' I guess she'll be abler ter foot it along with ther rest ov yer, soon ez we ax her ter step out."

As he spoke he caught hold of the rope below where it was tied to the stick, and without any great effort began to draw it up himself. The ascent had not winded him a particle, and the weight of the child was nothing to what his own would have been.

The others took hold as they saw the chance, while Adam stood back with clasped hands, watching and waiting in fear and trembling, even yet unwilling to believe in the certainty of the rescue.

Perhaps it was because nature had just succeeded in reasserting her powers, or it may be that the rough handling had something to do with it; but as she crossed the line of the mouth of the shaft and was fairly borne into the light of day, the Kitten opened her eyes and looked around her.

The axes of her eyes were turned straight upon old Adam, and the man gave a great shout.

"She lives! She lives! Now tell me there are no bones broken and I will rise up and call you blessed!"

He pushed forward as he spoke, and bent over his granddaughter—as he would always call her.

"Go jest a leetle slow, ole man!" cautioned the leader, in whose arms the girl still lay, a motionless weight.

"Thar's no bones broke, an' you kin see fur yerself thet thar's no blood spilled; but she's hed a orful shock, an' you don't want ter git her excited. Best plan'll be ter git her to my shanty soon ez posseble. An' we don't want no crowd ter come a-howlin' 'round, shakin' her up wuss ner ever, callin' back to her mind w'ot she's passed through. All Sunshine'll want ter take a talk with her soon, ef we don't throw 'em off someways. It ain't so fur to ther shanty but w'ot they'd be thar most ez soon ez we ef they caught a glimp' ov ther way they went. You do jest ez we say, an' we kin fix that, though."

And this was the way the kidnappers took to lead Adam away quietly, and aiding as far as he could to leave no trace of the direction in which they went.

It was little less than a miracle that they got back to the divide without making a trail, muffled though their feet were, and lightly as they stepped. But they accomplished it, and five minutes before the delegation from Sunshine was in sight, they disappeared across the "hogback," and were chuckling at the way they were losing themselves among the devious mazes of the canyons trending toward the mountains.

Adam had taken as truth the assertion of the leader of the four, that it was not far to his cabin, and recognizing the fact that he had not, as yet, the strength to carry the Kitten himself, he trudged along at his side, in quiet contentment, for some distance.

The man who had managed the rescue had the appearance of, and spoke like a rough, but good-hearted miner. Appleby had not, at first, a doubt as to the sort of hands into which he had fallen.

But the further he went, strange to say, the less tired he felt. He was recovering from the shock, and his nerves were swinging upward in exaltation. He began to note things with a sharpness beyond his normal state.

Without telling why, the grip on his arm, gentle though it might be, seemed to remind him that he was a prisoner. The road appeared to be anything but the straightest to a neighboring cabin; and there was a discipline about the movements of the men which struck him as a little singular.

He tried to halt, speaking as he did so:

"This is worse than having the men of Sunshine to sympathize with us. Kitty will be killed by the journey if it is much further. Let us rest here, and if one of you will be so kind as to look for water I think she will soon be all right."

"No need fur water, old man, when I hev a flask ov the oh-be-joyful, ready ter sacrelize when she gits that fur on ther road along. Jest you travel, now, tell we tell yer ter stop. An' yer don't want ter make any airs over goin', either. We don't want to, but we kin kerry you too, ef we hev to; an' ef we do it'll be feet fu'st, you jest bet."

About that time Adam was aware he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EZRA SWINGS LOW.

BILLY BIRCH made no mistakes when he followed up the trail of Uncle Ezra to the spot where it became invisible. Up to that point every thing had been just as he read it.

Unfortunately, right here a mistake was made which caused the subsequent search to be without result. The two principal trailers reasoned out which way the route of the tramp must have been laid—and missed it badly. Ezra had been governed by the movements of the others, and so actually threw Steve Allen out. Some traces of his that were found while making a wide detour caused the party to search in entirely the wrong direction.

It was only a chance Ezra got into the affair at all. The four men had no designs on him, from the fact that they had no orders. As with Jean Jaimeson, all they wanted of him was his absence. He had been seen, of course; but it did not seem he had any more business in the neighborhood than the average man of his class.

The tramp, as Birch had reasoned, started to return to Sunshine, and would have kept on his way had it not been for a glimpse of a skulker, who vanished almost the instant he was seen.

"Sure ez yer live," thought Ezra, "thar's fun in ther air. Swing low, Unkel, an' mebbe you'll hev a chance ter see who's who. Mister Jaimeson seems ter be a fine young man, an' it'd be a dog-goned shame ter stan' back an' let that gang frum ther Light take a whack at him. An' het ye a dollar that's w'ot it means. They're follerin' him up torrads ther Red Dog, an' trees is mighty conven'yent. Reckon I might ez well foller too."

It was with this idea in his head that he turned back, and made his way quietly and secretly to the spot where he could command a view of the mouth of the shaft.

The first thing he saw was Jaimeson, in full retreat for Sunshine.

That struck him as a little strange, for he thought he had gauged the young man pretty thoroughly, and did not believe he was one to actually run away until he had tried to learn the strength of the hand out against him.

From where he crouched, however, he could also command the spot where the four were hiding, although he did not see them until they moved out from their concealment. He noted that one of them remained on the watch, and decided they were not interested in Jaimeson so long as he remained at a distance.

Then he turned his attention more particularly to the figure he could see crouching at the top of the shaft. A very brief consideration told him what was the matter.

If he had not been on his guard, he might have hastened down to learn the exact nature of the accident he was certain had taken place.

Feeling sure, however, that foul play of some kind was intended, he waited. The four were within long pistol-range, but he neither felt like opening on the new-comers without warning, nor trusting himself closer, until he had a chance to consider how it was likely he would be met.

In this way it happened that he saw the three talk a little with Adam; saw the rescue of the child, in so far as it was visible from a distance; and finally, saw them all depart together, the biggest ruslian carrying over his shoulder what seemed to be the lifeless form of the girl.

"Mebbe it's all right; an', then ag'in, mebbe it ain't. 'F I war you, Ezry, I wouldn't git too fur forrads. It's a queer sorter a gang, an' better know a leetle more about it afore yer comes ter speakin' terms. Whar be they goin' with ther corpus? I'll foller on, swingin' low, 'tell I kin see w'ot comes next. I've a eenterest thar, an' now's ther time ter look after it. 'F I knew ther story ov last night I might be a-guessin' neider to w'ot's goin' on hyer ter-day."

His thoughts would have showed him still in doubt as to what was the meaning of the things he saw; but his actions declared he meant to keep on the safe side. When the party moved away he followed at a distance, for the greater part of the time keeping them in view. He saw how careful they were to leave no trail, even down to Adam.

Why the old man should do so was a puzzle for a time, but he ceased trying to solve it when he saw the change in the demeanor of the men, after Adam was fairly given to understand he was a prisoner. There was a more important question, now, to solve.

"Blamed ef I don't think it's some ov Bloom's gang—mebbe Bloom hisself at ther head ov it. Wished I knowned. Thar's a right smart reward offered fur him, an' Unkel Ezra would be jest ther man ter make ther scoop."

At the thought Ezra dropped his hand toward his weapons, mechanically feeling for them to make sure they were ready for use. There could be no question but what he was getting into a perilous business.

"Won't do, though, ter make a riot tell I'm sure ov w'ot's goin' on. Ter light out on four to one, 's waltzin' onter bigger odds than I keer ter fool with, unless it's got ter be did. They know how ter handle theirselves, 'thout a doubt, an' wile I war a-downin' two ther other two'd be gettin' in ther work fine. Guess I'll see whar they're goin' to, an' be on h'nd w'en needed, an' not a minnit sooner. Swing low, Ezry! hyer's a adventure."

Adam Appleby had surrendered without a word of protest, and was moving off once more, anxious only for his grandchild, and too wise to waste time in pleading with men who he knew must be beyond reaching by a non-combatant like himself. Surely, they could not have much further to go; and when they halted he would have a better chance to see how badly the Kitten had been hurt.

That was what made Adam step off once more, at a lively rate, and once started he was kept going. Once, when he tried to halt, as if for further argument, Ezra saw that a pistol was pointed at the old man, and made a dive for his own; but the danger passed away. Adam was not ready to die yet. The procession continued to move.

"Blamed ef I think ther youngster are dead," muttered Ezra, a little later, as he caught sight of a slight motion in the head lying across the leader's shoulder.

"Ef I war nearer I'd sw'ar I saw her wink at ther ole man; but 'f course that's on'y a obtickle elushun. Frum w'ot leetle I've see'd ov her, though, that would be jest like her. Cur'ous how I'm gittin' eenterested in her! I'll foller now ef it takes me clean out ov ther destrict."

It was a weary old tramp, even for Uncle Ezra. The four were not suspicious, but they were constantly on their guard, and he had to be all the time watchful. Now and then it was necessary to make a wide detour to avoid the probability of being seen. When, at length, a halt was made the tramp was thoroughly satisfied.

"Think they're in no danger, an' willin' ter rest 'em up a bit. I want ter be double keerful now. Like ez not they will be a-sentin' one ov 'em back ter see thar's no one comin' on their trail. Ther lower I swing ther better it'll be fur yourn truly."

He crouched down just in time, and Nulty, on his way to take a station some distance back on the trail, missed seeing him, as he passed.

After that, Ezra ventured so near that he was able to hear as well as see, and was satisfied as to the intentions of the men—and more interested than ever.

"Now would be ez good a time ez any ter slaughter 'em; but then I wouldn't git a chance ter see w'ot's comin' after. 'Pears ez though I war gittin' a leetle light. I'll let things run till I git a heap sight more. Ther gal's comin' round all right, an' I must know whar she goes to. I kin understand why, 'thout ary one tellin' me a word."

The Kitten really must have had nine lives; or life enough to count for nine when compared with the average person. She was not only living, but was a good deal stronger than she had any intention of allowing her captors to understand. It went against her to leave Adam in the dark, but as he was so highly delighted to know she was no worse than she seemed, it appeared to her it would do him no harm to allow him to rest satisfied with that, and save her energies for the chance which the concealment might offer her.

It was quite a wan smile with which she regarded Adam as he bent over her, some time after the halt had been made. She had taken several drops of whisky, and a few sips of water, had moved her limbs sufficiently to show no bones were broken, and had declared nothing hurt particularly, but she felt terribly weak.

"Then, I reckon you'll be able ter travel a bit fu'ther 'thout it's doin' ary harm?" asked the leader.

"Can't say thet I keer ter kerry a body, but ef yer can't go livin' I'll hev ter take yer dead; an' I war jest thinkin' thet ef thar war ter be ary trouble an' foolishness, I mou't ez well shet ther wind off at once."

The face of the Kitten became a little paler at the threat, but she did not lose her self-possession, or speak as though she was much alarmed.

"I don't know whether I can walk very far, though I can try; but I think you had better carry me. After all this trouble, you can't make me believe I'm not worth more living than dead. I don't think it would hurt me a bit, then, especially if grandpa had hold of my hand. And it might help him along, too. I guess, if you knew it, he was hurt worse than I."

"I'll be blamed ef she hain't got nerve!" grumbled the man, looking at one of his companions who stood near.

"She orter know it war nothin' funny I war sayin', an' most leetle ones would 'a' bin screamin' ef they had heard it. Nine times outer ten it would 'n' bin sound sense she war talkin'; but this hyer are ther tenth, an' it don't 'ply. Ain't sure but I'd suit better ef I brung yer dead. Ef I on'y knowned it, w'ot a heap ov trouble it might save."

"You can't scare me a bit," retorted the Kitten, carefully reducing the volume of her voice to what she thought was the proper depression.

"I can understand the whole story better than you can tell it to me, because this is not the first time I have been carried off. If we are going anywhere we had better start. If we are not, don't bother. I feel as though I wanted to sleep."

"That settles it, then. We'll start at once. Ef you play out on ther road, look out fur breakers, that's all."

Ezra was listening, and admiring the courage of the girl. In fact, he was entirely too much interested for his own safety. He was perilously near to the speaker; and had forgotten Nulty, who had not been chosen vidette for nothing.

"Talks ez though she mou't be a chip ov ther ole block," he was chuckling to himself.

"Thar sha'n't no harm come ter sich a spry leetle kitten wile Unkel Ezry's 'round."

And just then Nulty came trailing up from behind, and got in his work with the butt end of his pistol.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SACRAMENTO SAM'S LITTLE GAME.

CHEP D'AUBEGNE was aware of the results of the investigation made in the room of Jean Jaimeson, the night before. He also had received an account of the conversation which ensued between Jaimeson, and the sport known as Sacramento Sam. He had been somewhat staggered; but it seemed to him that Dr. Mabel must have been sure of her game beyond the possibility of a mistake before risking so much. And right or wrong, there could be no doubt about her desire to see the man removed.

From the conference at Paddy Porter's cabin

D'Aubegne strolled away with the air of one who has made a duty call. No one could have guessed from his face the important matters he had been discussing, nor did he seem like a man who was out on the war-path. All the same, he was about to hunt for Jaimeson; and when found to do his best to remove him permanently. He had not been able to rid himself of the impression that Mabel had more reason to fear this stranger to the town than she had yet given. And, anyhow, he was evidently very much in the way.

Of course, he did not intend to intrude upon him at the hotel, and shoot him down without a chance. Sunshine was rough, but it would not stand that.

But, he was to be found about town, it would be hard if he could not find some way to open the game that would end in the death of one or the other. It scarcely seemed probable the stranger would venture again to the Living Light, yet there was the place Chet decided to begin his search; and there, too, was the spot he found him. Jaimeson and Sacramento Sam came in together, a moment or two after Chet arrived.

To make the matter a little more difficult for the parson, the two came directly toward him.

"I haven't forgotten," was the salutation of Sacramento Sam.

"I guess we will know who is chief in Sunshine before the night is over; and I have brought along another candidate for honors. Friend of mine, Jean Jaimeson by name. Hope you will know each other on sight, for there is not much time to spend getting acquainted. Ought to have been here sooner, but we got to talking on the porch, and forgot how time was flying. As soon as Allison is at leisure we had better get to work."

Chet acknowledged the introduction by a bow, and did not offer his hand. There was something honorable about him. He did not care to take the hand of the man he intended to slay, though it would not do to throw away the chance which fate seemed to be putting in his way.

"As soon as you like, and the more the merrier. I have nothing else in view for the evening, and I guess Nip has saved himself up after the same fashion. He will be around soon, or we will hunt him up and carry him this way."

"We won't have long to wait. I see him looking this way now. He has hardly forgotten the appointment."

The worthy proprietor certainly had not forgotten; but the night was still young, and he was busy just then. He gave a little nod as he caught three pair of eyes turned in his direction. The motion said they should wait, he would be with them soon.

That suited Chet better than anything else he could have done. He nodded back and began a desultory conversation. D'Aubegne would have liked to introduce something about Paddy Porter and the reception Jaimeson had met with the night before, but hesitated about being too brusque. As next best thing he brought in the subject of the disappearance of Adam Appleby and his granddaughter, after the accident, which had possibly killed one, if not both.

"By the way, you had better look a little out in dealing with some of the plain-spoken toughs of the burg. I heard some one hinting this evening that you might know more of the business than you cared to tell."

Chet turned to Jaimeson as he spoke, and looked him over thoroughly, as though searching for a reason for the supposition.

"Much obliged for the hint. I find they are quick on the trigger here, though not altogether unreasonable when they know the truth, or take time for a second thought. I confess I cannot see what grounds any man can have for the supposition, which is wide enough from the mark, I can assure you."

"Oh, I don't know. If a man had the imagination to start him on that track it would not be hard for him to find proofs of the mare's nest. A good deal could be said on the subject without stretching the facts as we know them."

"I was not aware of it," answered Jaimeson, coolly. He was willing to drop the subject.

In spite of his good intentions he felt he had not cut as respectable a figure in the affair as he would have liked.

"Oh, yes. The man I heard speaking made out quite a case. He reasoned something had been done that would not have been done without a reason; and said all that was necessary to get on the trail was to figure out who was to be profited by it."

"Really, I cannot see how any one could make out I would be profited. Until last night I was an utter stranger in Sunshine, and they know little more about me now."

"That is just it. There is no one in Sunshine that would give a cent whether old Appleby lived or died, and we all know that. They don't know but what you would, and that is what narrows it down. And then, I must say, it looks like quite a family matter. You were around calling on the old man last night, and going out to see him this morning. That goes to show you were not altogether strangers. And then, this mysterious tramp! That is another strong point."

"You certainly must be speaking in parables. As I suppose they are for my instruction, all I can do is to say go ahead! But, blessed if I can understand them."

"That may be because you don't look from the standpoint of other people."

"Everybody knows you were on the street with him last night; and he met you on your way out to the shaft, and had some talk with you, as you have acknowledged. Then he turns up in the neighborhood after you left. If he didn't spirit the two away, who did? There is no sign of any one else having been in the neighborhood. Take it altogether it is about as black as the average case having nothing in it which comes before Judge Lynch. As long as there is nothing found of the girl I suppose you will be all right; but if her corpse should happen to turn up, and the boys got on the howl, I wouldn't give much for your chances. Last night was only a bit of fun that blew itself out before they got really warm; but this thing would be real old business."

Chet allowed himself to get a little warm as he concluded. Indeed, that was part of his game. If Jaimeson could be provoked his end would be accomplished. Failing in that, there was the lynch court in the distance. He had not thought of it when he sat down, but he saw while he talked what a case could be made out against the man he hated, little as he knew of him.

But whether his intention was perceived or not it made no difference to Jaimeson, who was, if anything, less concerned than at the first. He smiled slightly as he answered:

"I am willing to trust to it that when the girl is found it will be found, too, that my skirts are altogether blameless. If not I am willing to abide the consequences. You don't believe such fairy tales, and I know they are all wrong, so there is little use dwelling further on the subject. Here comes Mr. Allison; and if we meet him half-way we will strike him just about the bar. Suppose we name our vanities and then get down to business. Two days have I wasted since I struck the town, and if this thing goes on much longer it will be time for me to retire."

"I don't know about it," said Nip, a little later, eying the two strangers a trifle dubiously.

"I don't doubt there will be a heap of fun about the game; but it looks like risking a little too much, according to my notion. You two may be old pards, for all I know; and Cbet and I may have made it out to play into each other's hands. That would make a heap sight of difference in the strength of the game, you understand. I'm not at all asserting that anything of the kind is the case, but I am getting my soul ready for a surprise, if one does come."

"Don't be frightened before you are hurt," said Chet, who despised anything like talking for effect before the game began.

"You and I will sit opposite, if you want it so, but I think the reputation of the proprietor of the Living Light is too well established to permit of anything like crooked work being tried in his presence. I know it is hard for an old-timer to play what could strictly be called a square game, because there are certain little points of which he will take advantage. Beyond that I guess we are sure there will be no going. Throw around for deal, and quit your nonsense."

It was true enough that the way the party was seated there was little danger of the strangers playing into one another's hands, and because they were strangers, and because the arrangement was also a check on the two Sunshine chiefs, they made no objection to the arrangement.

Each man was for himself; and the money was to be for the one who played the biggest hands to the best advantage.

The contest which ensued was a battle of the giants, even though the amount of stakes involved did not run up among the fancy figures sometimes named when the cattle kings and mine-owners of the West meet for a bout with the pasteboards. Each of the four was well heeled for the fray, even if the betting did not always reach the hundreds, let alone the thousands.

From the outset Chet was watching his man closely. If he was a professional, as he had been led to believe, it was not in the nature of things that he would not, if hard pressed, attempt some advantage; and Chet believed that he had sharp enough eyes to detect anything of the kind on the instant, and expose it.

That was placing a good deal of reliance on his own luck, and the strength of his game.

Unfortunately, for once his calculations failed. Either the luck of the strangers was exasperatingly above his own, or they knew a thing or two as yet unknown to D'Aubegne.

Closely as he watched the deck, to make sure there was no holding out, there were several hands, as he was willing to aver, most miraculously filled, though he could see nothing to justify him in calling for a count of the cards.

It began to look as though he would have to invent a case if he wanted to bring Jaimeson to punishment parade.

Then, when he had made up his mind to this, and was trying to make up a scheme and at the same time play two small pair to the best ad-

vantage, luck suddenly changed, and the winning hands began to be held by the two men of Sunshine.

The struggle was none the less hard, but Chet recognized the state of affairs in a moment, and pressed his luck accordingly. He was sure, now, the game had been square from the first, and if the cards were going to continue running his way, he could soon retrieve his losses.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JEAN JAIMESON HOLDS HIS OWN.

JAIMESON had drawn three cards, while, in the deal, D'Aubegne had caught two kings, and in the draw another one. Besides these high cards he held a little pair.

As Sacramento Sam passed out, and Nip was betting in a hesitating way, after getting four cards from the dealer, D'Aubegne, who had made up his mind he had better at least get square before proceeding to extremities, thought this was his chance, and rustled in accordingly.

He was too wise to do more than simply cover Nip's bet. Before making any demonstration it was necessary to know whether Jaimeson had a hand sufficiently good to lose money on. Unless he had it would do Chet no good to expose himself.

Evidently, Jean thought he had. Without the air of one who was bluffing he raised the ante out of sight.

"It is my turn, now," he said, as he strung out his money on the table to get at the condition of his acquired capital.

"I think I have a hand worth risking a hundred on, anyhow. Let us hear again from the rural districts."

"If by that you mean you are anxious to know what I am going to do," answered Nip, "I can relieve your uncertainty in a minute. I am going to pass out."

And without any hesitation he threw his cards face down in front of the dealer.

That left the game as Chet rather wanted it. He looked again at his cards, and doubled the ante.

Jaimeson did not appear frightened, or even nervous. He raised Chet twenty-five, and leaned back in his chair to have a better view of his face. As for his cards, he did not want to look at them a second time.

He had them all bunched together on the table in front of him.

"Oh, come now! Don't begin to hedge just when things are in running order. At least keep up the pace you started on," urged Chet, dropping down another hundred.

"Money talks, and there is what says I hold the better hand."

"No hedging for me. I only thought it the part of prudence to let up on the pace a little for fear it might prove too strong for you, and you would bolt the track altogether. Hundreds go, as long as the buckskin holds out. If you want to crowd it into the thousands I have no objection so there are not too many of them. I hate to beg for a sight the first game in a strange place."

"If that means you will see it, or go better, nothing would stop me. Here is one as a flyer, anyhow."

"And there is the purse. Meet it and we will show down. When both are willing to go the entire limit there is no use to beat around the bush. I'll make all, or have nothing. What have you got? There is the size of my hand."

And as D'Aubegne had met the proposal by placing his own pocketbook in the middle of the table Jaimeson turned up his cards, showing four little deuces.

"Excuse me," said Chet, in his coldest manner.

"Ordinarily, I do not kick, and the size of the pot is no particular inducement; but when I come across a deck with five deuces in it, I feel that it is time to draw the line. I thought there was an odd card or two afloat, and now I know it."

"It's a blessing you do, then, for everybody else was in the dark. Hands back from the table, now, and our friends will take charge of the stakes and count the cards. Throw up, or show up your hand, so that it can go back into the deck. This thing must be settled on the square, and right now. That beats jangling and wrangling all out of sight."

The answer convinced Chet he had made a mistake. He should have drawn before speaking. It was too late now; and whatever might be the result of the count they would start even, unless it should prove that Jaimeson held a little the advantage. The parson more than half suspected the stranger had a derringer up his sleeve, judging from the way the arm that had been resting on the table now pointed at him.

The gambler had counted on his man making a dive for pistols when he heard the charge; and as he acknowledged no superior in that sort of work, Chet had figured it out he could get his own out just a trifle the soonest.

"Hate to say it, Chet, but are you sure you are not mistaken? The gentleman can make a little allowance, and if you say the word I think it would be all right. I have been watching the run of the cards pretty closely, and I must say,

I have not been able to see anything looking like an advantage. It would be a pity for any one to get out of the damp because there was an error of eyesight."

"Curses on it, no! There can be no mistake. Count the cards and I am ready for the consequences."

After that there was no use to delay. In a quiet, methodical way, Allison gathered all the cards into one pack, and beganto run them off.

"Hello! How is this?" he exclaimed.

The words were unfortunate, and escaped his lips without thought, or he would have bitten them off before they were uttered. In reality, they had nothing to do with the matter under consideration. He had come across five cards that he felt pretty sure had been in Sacramento Sam's hand, and they were better than he thought such an expert would have passed on. With three of a kind, 'most any one would have gone some distance with the rest of the players.

D'Aubegne was sure Nip had found what he, for a very good reason, was certain he would come across. He had slipped an extra deuce in the deck, and run the chances. Without hesitation he swung his hand around and up, catching his revolver in the motion.

As the weapon was self-acting, all he had to do was to pull the trigger when it came into line.

Jaimeson was watching, however, though it seemed as if his attention was centered on Nip. He raised his hand; and the two reports came together.

The seance was being held in the private room, which Nip held sacred to the use of himself and friends, and there were no spectators. The four had everything to themselves—until after the shots were fired.

Then, a section of pandemonium broke loose. A crowd swarmed right into the room, regardless of danger, and it was just as well that Jaimeson was not there alone to meet it.

Sacramento Sam was nearest to the door, and he was cool enough to hear in advance the coming rush. He was not sure as yet of the rights of the case, or what had actually happened, but he knew what would be the result if the crowd got at once to close quarters. With a quick motion he jerked the chair on which he had been sitting directly in front of the threshold.

The first man in went down over the chair, and half a dozen more went down over him. There was a chorus of howls, yells, and even some laughter. Exactly what had happened was not as yet known, since, as the chair struck the floor some one had overturned the table, and had it not been for the light that came in from the other room when the door flew open, all would have been in darkness.

"Hold on, there, you!" shouted Allison.

"Keep back, you outsiders, or there will be more powder burned, and the lead will be coming in your direction. Out of this, all of you! If I did right I would open fire as it is. What do you mean, coming in on a private little party? Here, Chet! You knock them on the head while I begin to throw them out. And Johnny, bring in a light. This was smashed some way, and it was a holy blessing we didn't all go up along with it when it fell. Jump, there, all of you! I mean it."

It was rather a large contract for one man to undertake—the emptying of the room. If it had not been for the fact that some of those who got furthest in were men who took Nip's money, to see that the house was run as he wanted it, there might have been a failure. As it was, since there appeared to be no war going on, the thing was done somehow. Neither the crowd, nor Nip himself, knew exactly the status of affairs, or there might have been more trouble, even if there was not less effort.

Chet D'Aubegne for once had missed in his calculations, though only by a hair's breadth. If it could have been seen, there was a lock of Jaimeson's hair on the floor, and the bullet was in the wall just behind where his head had been an instant before.

That was bad enough; but it was worse still for the parson, since the blood was dropping from his hand at a great rate, and the revolver that had been torn from it by the bullet from Jaimeson's derringer lay somewhere behind him, he knew not where. Unless it had been a chance shot, very neatly had he been disarmed, and now his life was at the mercy of the man he hated. He did not dare to scramble for the weapon he had dropped, or try to draw another, for he saw, when the light flashed in again, in the other hand of Jaimeson there was a revolver which covered him. The next shot would mean certain death.

Scarcely a glimpse of all this did the crowd have, or it might not have been possible for even Nip Allison to have cleared the room. When that was done, however, and Johnny had brought the light for which he had called, the proprietor turned sternly to Chet:

"Sorry for you, parson; but I must say it serve you right. When you left the thing in my hands to settle, that left you out till I was done talking. Put up your shooting-irons,

stranger, and call this thing off. After such a racket there would be no use in counting the cards. If there is any more shooting to be done, it is to be decently and in order, and Nip Allison says it."

Without any hesitation Jaimeson dropped his pistol back to its receptacle, though he kept a sharp lookout for the next move of Chet D'Aubegne.

The gambler had been sickened for the moment, since his hand was badly torn. With such a hand it was next to useless to throw himself bodily on his antagonist when the light went out, and when the darkness was gone it was entirely too late.

He was bursting with passion, however, though he had been able to restrain himself while looking into the muzzle by which he had been covered. Now he broke out.

"What sort of a cold deck is this you are trying to wring in on the man who considered you his friend. Are you in the partnership? Curses on it! the skinner has maimed me so that my pistol-hand will be no good for a week, and you talk about setting me up to be shot. If you are going to back the hand of a man who uses a double-deck, and draws when another man's hands are up, the sooner Sunshine knows it the better. Before this racket is forgotten I'll have something to settle with you."

"Whenever you are in shape for the move you can advance on the works of the enemy," retorted Nip, who saw that he held the advantage all around.

"You ought to know the platform the Light runs on, by this time. If two or more gentlemen start a game to themselves they are welcome to settle the points that arise in any way they choose. But when you bring me into the game, everybody else that is in it, saint or stranger, will have fair play as long as I run the house. If you gents want to have a shot at each other, after a white man's fashion, you can get to work, right now. Or if I have stepped too heavy on the toes of any one he can come back on me; but I am not going to have any promiscuous racket with all out doors to boom it along. How is it, now? Peace or war?"

"Oh, peace, of course," was the answer, given in quite a different tone. The parson had forgotten himself for a moment, but had recovered himself by this time. It was no part of his plan to quarrel with Nip, and he knew well enough the latter meant every word he said. A queer sort of a sport was Nip Allison, with strange notions about his duty to himself.

Chet's face had recovered its usual expression, and he was trying to tie up his injured hand.

"Allow me," said Sacramento Sam, stepping forward.

"Looks like a bad bite, and I should say the sooner you had a regular sawbones take a look at it the better. Might save some crippled fingers."

"Thanks," said D'Aubegne, gravely.

"I will look after it, sure enough. I suppose you gentlemen have nothing more to say to me."

"Nothing," answered Nip, "if you are going to jump the game."

Chet vouchsafed no answer to that, but glided out of the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

A LETTER FROM THE HILLS.

Of the three, Allison was the most sober when the door closed behind the retiring gambler. He was sure he had made an enemy of a bad man; and that too, on account of one for whom he cared nothing at all. What he had done was for the sake of his principles; and because he thought he had been watching the game every whit as closely, and if there had been anything crooked he would have seen it.

"Sorry for the row, gents, though, from the way you took things I guess you have been there before. I would have sooner had your room than your company, anyhow; but Chet ought to have known how it would be when he wrung me into the game. As I don't suppose you and I will be at all intimate after this, I'll give you one bit of advice to close with. The next time you meet Chet there will be a bigger hole made in somebody; and unless you are heap-sight smart it will be in you. He's one of the most uncomfortable men to handle I ever knew, and if there was any betting going I would give odds he takes you in before the week is out if you stay in the burg. Don't let me hurry you away; but I have had all the game I want for the evening."

"Thanks for your warning," replied Jaimeson, to whom the words were addressed.

"I have been accepting the chances as they came along during a pretty lively life, and I am not afraid to keep on the same lines, even in Sunshine. Sorry I can't come into the Light without starting a racket, and for the sake of the proprietor, whom I have found to be as square as they make 'em, I can promise the finishing touches to the affair will not be put on here, unless it is before I get away."

"That's all right; you needn't try any blarney. It was from no love of you that I did what I did, and Chet understands that well enough. I will be sorry enough if he and I have to make a settlement. But square is square,

and whether the house is rough or not, I stand on that basis. No one is going to say anything to you as you pass out, if you don't stay too long. In the latter case it is your own lookout. Much obliged for the pleasant evening, gents, if the profit has been all on the one side. I believe you corralled the stakes when the light went out, and I don't know there is anything further to keep us here."

After a hint like that, the meeting adjourned.

"A queer sort of fellow is that same Nip Allison," remarked Sacramento Sam when they were on the street.

"Mixed in with a rough set; but might pass for honest in even a better crowd."

"Sorry if I spoiled the fun for you, but I had an idea of how it would work when you spoke of my going along with you. It seemed to be my night on, and I had to play the cards as they came along. As far as I can see, what boodle was going drifted into my pockets, so I can't complain if the amiable sport with a sore hand does try to convince me of the reality of the hereafter. I think we might as well—"

Jaimeson said no more. At that moment there was an interruption. Out from the shadow of the nearest building there came a shoot of flame, and Jean fell to the ground, just as a gurgling sort of a groan sounded, immediately behind him.

Fully convinced that his companion had gone the ultimate way of all flesh, Sacramento Sam did not hesitate or turn to see, but dashed forward, his revolver in his hand.

Quick though he was, he was too late to find the person who fired the shot, though he heard the light patter of footsteps as some one left the spot at whirlwind speed.

Sam was nimble of foot himself, and started on in full expectation of overtaking the fugitive, but he did not go far. He saw no one, the noise of the footsteps suddenly ceased, and he did not know which way to turn. The advantage of the ground was all against him.

He looked around a little, saw that he could do nothing further, and hastened back to look after his pard, whom he had left, as he believed, at least dangerously wounded.

As he approached the spot, he saw the outlines of a man on the ground, and those of another, who bent over him.

"Hello, there!" he shouted.

"Hands up till I see who you are, and what's your little game. If you are one of the gang, you can commence saying your prayers now. After I find out, there won't be much time left."

"Easy, Sam. I am all right, but this poor fellow seems to have caught it in my place. I caught on to the shadow just in time, and dodged right before the flash. I am afraid he is elected for the next delegation across the river."

The man on the ground did not seem entirely insensible, and Jean had been moistening his lips with a few drops of whisky from his flask. As Sam came up he groaned weakly, and tried to raise himself on his elbow.

"Steady now," said Jaimeson, whose words have already explained the situation.

"Better go slow till we find out how badly you are hurt. Where is it?"

"Oh, I'm doctored, curses on her. She held dead level, an' I got it right whar I live. I knew she had it in fur me, but I didn't think she'd take me foul. Give me a little more of that flooid lightnin'. Pears I'm gittin' weak mighty sudden. No use ter try ter plug it, stranger. Thar's a hole on both sides."

Nevertheless, when Jaimeson had given him the whisky asked for, he began to apply a hasty bandage, extemporized out of a couple handkerchiefs. As the fellow said, he was shot through and through, and there was not one chance in a hundred for him to live long; but the one chance might be worth feeling for.

"Don't try ter kerry me. It'll only kill me ther sooner; an' ef you took me anywhere, an' I got well, it might be all ther worse. Say, do ye really think she done it a purpose?"

"Poor fellow," said Sam, "his mind must be wandering."

"Not a bit of it," answered Jean, decisively.

"It was a woman who fired the shot; that much I am aware of, myself. She may have fired at him, but it is just likely it was intended for me."

"No, it was my life she war reachin' after. I war ter meet her hyer, an' when she drawed an' let go she knowed who she war reachin' after. But I'll git even. Say, stranger! Do yer think I could crawl around town a bit, an' hold steady when I found the party that done this?"

"I am afraid not. In five minutes from now you will not be able to talk, let alone walk; and, though I do not wish to frighten you, I must tell the truth. I suspect that in that time you will be so near dead you will have nothing further to say."

"All right, pard, that's your say-so; an' I spect ye'r right. But I must get even with her. Me a-riskin' my life ter bring her a letter; an' she shootin' me full ov holes on sight! That's ther way it goes. Hyer's ther letter, an'—pears I'm gittin' weaker mighty fast—you take it, an' do ther best yer kin. Good-mornin', Mr. Jones!"

And having kept his strength and courage up to the limit the fellow suddenly collapsed, just

when he had thrust into Jaimeson's hand the letter of which he spoke.

"This won't do," complained Sacramento Sam.

"Next thing we know the party in the shade will be coming back at us again. We must be getting out of this. And we can't leave the man here either. He seems to have fainted, but I don't think he is dead yet, or that he is going to die immediately. We must tote him to cover somewhere, and I guess the Little Lamb is as good a place as any."

Having once made up their minds to that, and the stranger being in no sort of condition to offer any objection, they hurried away as fast as they could go with their burden; and though there was a racket about it he was soon in comparative comfort, in a bed at the Lamb, while a messenger had been dispatched in search of the doctor.

"And there is where the fun will come in at," chuckled Jaimeson.

"She will have the chance to cure a case of her own making, and have the satisfaction of seeing me very much alive. Also, there may be a chance to convince her what an infernal fool she has made of herself."

"And moreover, to deliver that letter, which, if all you say is true, must be intended for her. What does it say, anyhow? You were to read it you know, and this time is as good as any other time, if not a little better."

"I am not sure we will be any better off for mixing in with the matter. It don't look exactly right for me to be asking the people to hang the woman for missing me, though it's the second trial she has made with her own hands. I'd sooner show her what a fool she was, and then let her go, reading her letter as she went along."

"Granny on that rot! There is something worth knowing in that letter, and we may as well corral the information. I'll read it, and you may listen while you watch your patient. Hand it over!"

Somewhat reluctantly the young man did as he was bidden, and without hesitation Sam opened the paper.

"Don't seem to be exactly a letter, either. There's no beginning after the orthodox style; and the wind up is just as abrupt. But here is what it says:

"If you have any use for the kid you'd better hurry it up. She seems to be hurt pretty bad, and I wouldn't wonder if she was to die on our hands before morning. The old one has nothing to say for himself, but a heap for her, and if she goes off the hooks I wouldn't be surprised if he croaked at the same time.

"We have hold of another odd genius, who seemed to be wanting a hand in the matter without any particular reason. He says the kid is no relation to the old man at all, but that he picked her up in a mining camp some ten years ago, on the Kearns River, and that her original name was Hurd. Says I had better make a note of that for future reference. He did not speak straight out; but I thought he was hinting we had better tell these things to you. If he had not had a hard head he would have been laid out on the board before he had a chance to say anything; as he seemed to know what he was a-talking about, thought it best to keep him in soak until we had orders. What shall we do? He has a star tattooed on his wrist, and an ugly scar in the region of his throat, which he suggested it would be well to describe to all parties concerned."

The letter ended as abruptly as it opened, and the two men looked at each other in indignation, though it was Jaimeson who spoke first.

"The infernal scoundrel! It is plain enough what it is about, and I'll make him pay dear for his literary efforts, if it costs me every cent I have in the world. As long as I was not sure anything in the line of foul play had happened to them, I did not care to get too far in front; now that I am sure, I will follow it to the end."

"And the lady in the case! Do you intend to give her the letter?"

"We will see. I think she is coming now."

It was her hand that sped the bullet which laid out the patient. Doctor Mabel did not seem at all troubled over the matter. She came in with her usual confident air, escorted by the messenger who had been sent to summon her.

"A bad case," she said, as she looked down on the white face and motionless figure.

"It was hardly worth while to send for me. About all has been done that need be done. He is a dead man now."

"Not as bad as that, I hope," answered Sacramento Sam, to whom her words seemed to be addressed.

"The bleeding has stopped, and I have seen men walk away with bigger holes than those in their bodies."

"He has been bleeding internally," continued the doctor, bandaging the wound with deft fingers.

"There was no hope for him the moment the lightning struck him. Who is he? where did it happen? and what did he have to say for himself? I suppose he has talked some?"

"Very little. We picked him up on the street. He said something about a letter he was to deliver, so I judge he is from a distance. Beyond that I could say nothing."

"A letter!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Where is it? What was it about? It might give some sort of a clew."

Her eyes fell upon the paper where it had been tossed aside on her entrance, and she caught it up, hastily glancing over the contents as she leaned toward the lamp.

"Badly hurt! Kearns river! Hurd! Star on his wrist; scar on his throat! Gracious heavens! Dead before morning! Never!"

She dashed the paper aside, and without a word to the listeners, or a glance at her patient, darted from the room.

"Keep an eye on the man, and if he revives, get him to tell where he comes from. I must see where the doctor goes."

Sacramento Sam spoke hastily, and without waiting for an answer, burried through the door and along the hallway.

For once he was off guard, and as he sprung out into the street, he received a blow that stretched him almost senseless.

When he had crawled to his feet it was too late to follow the doctor. She was out of town.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TOM BENHAM'S TEETH.

THE doctor owned a horse, and could ride it, spiced though it was supposed to be with the devil. She was sent for at times to come to other mining-camps, or to attend at some sick bed in the mountain cabins. When thus called on she always rode Spittfire, and wasted no precious moments as she went.

The animal was as good, or as bad, as its name, since no one but herself could do much with it. With her own hand she fed and groomed it, and it was she who saddled and bridled it. Day or night, it was the same to her, though there was scarcely any one else in Sunrise who would have cared to trust to the tender mercies of the Tartar's heels.

Madame Mabel was saddling in haste. No time had been lost after leaving the Little Lamb, and even if nothing had happened to Sacramento Sam he would hardly have found her unless he knew exactly where to go. She knew nothing of the blow he had received, for, from the moment of leaving the hotel, she never slackened her flight until she had her hand on saddle and bridle, and was turning to Spittfire.

"One moment, if you please!"

If the voice had not been familiar she would have shot back an answer with a leaden word; but she recognized Tom Benham as the speaker and held her hand.

"Another time, if you please. Unless it is life or death I dare not tarry."

"Oh, I guess it is not as bad as that; but you will have to listen to me anyhow. You will excuse the liberty; but I thought there might be some sense in doing it, and so listened at the window. I didn't quite understand all I saw and heard, but when that sport with a charm tried to follow you I had sabbe enough to drop him, anyhow."

"You killed him?" asked the woman, sharply.

"No, I didn't kill him. I didn't think it wise to make a noise just then, and had left my knife at home; but I heard his head crack when I d'owned him with my preserver, and he won't trouble you any more to-night. It's something about myself that I want to remark; a word or two about Chet. Perhaps the last had better be first."

"Go on, then, but, for heaven's sake, cut it short. I am in haste."

"So I see, and that's what's the matter. You see, Chet has been fooling around that tender-foot of yours, and come off second best. Nothing actually serious, but he has an awful bad hand, and is looking for you all over town to do it up. He won't be worth a cent for anything to-night, and the sooner you give him a dose of morphine, and send him to his little bed, the better. So, you see, it don't exactly suit for you to make a trip to the country right now."

"Confound it! After my warning! He deserves it. If it is only his hand his life can be in no danger, and I ought to let it go till morning."

"That's so, if there was nothing else to think about. Perhaps you have forgotten all about me."

"No, I forget nothing, but there are other things more important. I cannot wait. Let him go to old Morehead. He can attend to it just as well as I can. And for the other matter—call it off for the present."

"It's too late to say that. The chance showed itself before the time set, and I didn't wait. I have done the trick."

"You have done it—alone?"

"Not exactly alone. I had a little assistance. Here is the old man's letter, and here is the document out of the bank; but as for the bonds, I thought I had better put them in a safe place, till I could see how the cat was going to hop, or whether it would hop at all."

"Let them stay there, then. If they are safe enough for you, they will keep all right for me. That ought to satisfy you. Out of the way, now! I have something more important than bonds to think of."

She took the papers extended toward her, and then turned away toward Spittfire. There had been a momentary interest to hear how Benham

had done the work; but it vanished before he finished speaking, and she did not appear to notice that he gave no explanation at all.

"You must be mighty certain of the other matter not to care to look at fifty thousand. It was a big thing not long ago. Are you and Chet thinking of dropping me, or are you trying to drop us both? When a person is in such a hurry to leave town, it looks as though a heap of sand had been lost, or there was something worse behind it."

The doctor turned on him fiercely.

"Are you all prepared to go over the range that you talk to me like that? When I get ready to have you go out of the game, I'll let you know. Then, if you don't go, you'll drop. You ought to understand that much. I'll give you one minute more to say what you have to say, and I'll let you know beforehand, that the person who tries to bluff me is heaping up danger for himself in the near future. If we have not been liberal enough, take what share you want, and no more growling. I will see you in the morning and talk to you by the yard, if it can be done safely. But to-night I have too much that is more important."

"If I was only sure of all that, I might not be in such a hurry now. I have done your work, and got paid for it like a fine fellow. I'm not grumbling about that. You picked up the news, furnished the plan, and were willing to go along when there was use or sense in it.

"But I have got to be looking out after my own precious safety. I've split one head open to-night, if not two; and to-morrow I can look out for a hullabaloo. That's a bad time to see my pard wastin' time over some other racket I don't know the rights of, and getting ready to skip the camp. If that last is to be for good, all right. Take me along, and we'll both go. There must be a heap sight of danger a-brewing when you won't stay to face the music for your quarter of a cool fifty thousand. I don't propose to do it all alone."

"You infernal idiot! I am going to see a patient, and I go protected by my profession. If you went along, they would strip you and turn you out to die, if they didn't make shorter work. So far, I have the advantage. The drop is on you, and if you say the word, I shoot. You can't afford to have a racket here, and I am not sure but what I can. At any rate, I am willing to run the risk. If you had not been, after a fashion, I would have had you down before this. If I turned you over to the tender mercies of Chet, he would do a heap sight less warning."

"Chet has enough to look after, as it is; and I suspect you are in the same boat. It's all I have to say. I thought there was a move of some such kind on foot, and I wanted so make sure before it was too late. If you look at those papers I gave I reckon you will find them blank, and as for the bonds—they are still safe in the bank. Start even, and give us the same show you have yourself, and they will be ours before morning. Keep on this way and they stay where they are, and Tom Benham will be looking around for a way to get even with the pards that tried to play him dirt."

"Perish the bonds—and you too!"

Spittfire was saddled now, and his head turned toward the mountains. As the doctor spoke she vaulted into the saddle, struck him sharply with her hand, and gave him his head.

More angry than he had yet shown, Benham dropped his hand to his hip as he stepped in front of horse and rider.

He had better left the doing of the latter alone. Spittfire sprung forward like an arrow from a bow, and there was a sickening crash as the man went down. Then the doctor was galloping along, alone.

"Goodby to Sunshine!" she muttered.

"I have hit a bad streak the last few days, and it looks as though there is nothing but a rope left for me there. Better than fifty thousand for me, and better for Chet, that we both be out of it. Perhaps he will follow."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MAN OF NERVE.

EITHER Sacramento Sam had sharper eyes than the doctor, or he hit the truth by a random shot. The wounded man was not dead; and if his lips could be believed he had still a fighting chance for life.

As the doctor left the room he gave a shudder, and then looked warily around him.

"Is she gone?" he whispered, his glances trying to reach the door.

"Yes, I think she has gone for good. Lie still, and say no more. Nothing will harm you here. I suppose you heard what she said?"

Jaimeson touched the man lightly. It seemed as though he was about to try to rise from the bed, no matter what the risk.

"I heard her: but it war lies, all lies. She known well enough: an' it war on'y part ov her game. She thought she'd skeer me. I wa'n't afear'd ov what she could say; but I war mighty much ov what she'd do. Ef I hed bin alone with her I'd 'a' screamed. 'Pears ez though I'm gittin' stronger."

"I don't think you do her justice. As her patient she would do her best to bring you

through. I must say, I thought at the time it was the truth she was telling. If she was mistaken, so much the better for you. Now, keep still and try to sleep. I think myself it would be best to do nothing more to your wounds till morning comes."

"Cause, then, yer believes, I'll be over the range. Mebbe so. An' mebbe not. How am I goin' ter git even? That's what I'm thinkin' ov. I'll do it sure, er bu'st a wheel."

"That's all right! That's all right! But don't be in a hurry about it, and perhaps you'll live long enough to see it done. Honest, pard, I have no interest in scaring you, nor in making you believe a lie; and I say it. You are mighty near to the gates. If you don't want to pass through to-night, keep yourself quiet, When Pard Sam comes back you can talk to him a little bit, and see if he don't tell you the same thing."

Jaimeson spoke as he did solely for the good of the man, and whether convinced or not the fellow closed his eyes, and apparently tried to slumber.

"Must say, I have the knack of getting myself into scrapes," thought Jaimeson, as he leaned back, watching the wounded man.

"Probably, if I had found this woman in her office when I called this afternoon I might have convinced her there was a mistake, somewhere. But no such luck. And she didn't seem to notice me when she was here, though I was expecting her to go right out on the war-path. I wish she would transfer her attentions to some one else, and give me a rest. She don't look demented, either. Perhaps, if she would consent to wear spectacles such mistakes would not occur."

And Jaimeson, right there, was hitting nearer to the truth than he really believed.

The wounded man lay quiet; and Jean did not care to think further about himself. Naturally, his ideas turned in the direction of Sacramento Sam.

"It takes him a long while to see which way she goes; wonder if he stopped her to have a little talk in the hall. If he thinks I am going to spend the night nursing our patient alone he is mistaken. It might be worth while to look around a little, and see if there is no one else available for the job."

With another look to make sure the man was all right, and could probably stand a temporary absence, he softly left the room.

He was sure Sam had at least gone as far as the front door, for he had heard his footsteps along the hall. Something impelled him to take a look outside before hunting in the office for an assistant nurse.

He almost stumbled over the object of his search.

"Go slow, old man. I have been looking at the stars, and I'm so near dazzled I can't tell t'other from which. Why didn't you come a little sooner? It would have saved me the trouble of picking myself up. Guess you would have done that much for a pard whose lines had fallen in rough places."

Sam was standing in front of him, holding his head between his hands and swaying uncertainly, as though he had half an idea to fall.

"What under the sun is the matter with you? Has the madame turned her attention your way?"

"Haven't the ghost of an idea who it was, but as I came out of the door some one tried the hardness of my head. Seems queer no one saw the affair, or stumbled across me. I've been lying here long enough for her to get half-way to Frisco. No use to look after me now. Is our friend in there dead?"

"Not yet. Fact is, I had the hardest kind of a time to convince him he wasn't strong enough to get right up and start out on the chase, to get even."

"Why in the name of heaven didn't you let him go? If you didn't find her you might have come across me, and either would have been good enough so it was done in time. Let's have a look at him. If he can't walk maybe he will be willing to talk; and that will answer for all practical purposes, so long as he tells the truth."

Sam was regaining his strength very rapidly. He shook his head, as if by so doing he was throwing off the dizziness which had troubled him, and then started out to find the truth as it might be told by the lips of the dying.

He entered softly, however, and stood by the side of the bed, looking down at the wounded man.

He was a rough-looking case, who seemed to have led a hard life, with lots of open-air exposure.

"No honest miner, this," murmured Sam.

"Can see that in his looks; and the tone of the letter showed who he probably is. But he is hard hit, and we can't throw him over till things are straightened, one way or another."

"That's said hearty, pard; an' somehow I b'lieve yer. Ef I knowed w'ich way it war goin' ter go, I could tell better w'ot I hed ought ter be doin' now. Honest Injun? How yer think it's goin' ter pan out?"

"Honest Injun, I don't know. If you want to make sure of paying back in the right way the person who brought you here you had better be putting in your little say-so without any delay. Life is mighty uncertain, and she won't linger long if she thinks you are going to pass the range. A worse case of murder I never saw; and if it turns out you can't hunt her down, I'll swear to do it myself if you will tell me who she is, and where she may be found. From what she said when leaving here, I am pretty certain she intends to visit the writer of the letter you were bearer of. There will be the place to look for her, and all you have to do is to give me the points."

The eyes of the fellow were weak and watery, but there was a suggestive leer in them as he looked up at the speaker.

"Mebbe it would hev bin jest ez well ef you hed stopped her afore she got thar. You knowed how it war, what better did ye want?"

"Bless your soull I tried, and I failed. What better answer do you want? But because I was tripped up once is no sign that it can be done again. I rather think not. My eyes are open."

"Missed it, did yer?"

The man grinned feebly. Somehow, there was some little satisfaction in hearing it.

"You wouldn't lie to a dyin' man. How did she do it?"

"Oh, if you have any doubts you can feel of the lump on my head. I don't know how it was done, but the results spoke for themselves. But don't waste any time. Speak up. The fever may step in any time, and then it will be too late."

"Wish I could do it, pard; but that's others that hev been true ez a die, an' I can't give them away. Guess you're all right, an' I'm booked fur ther long journey. I'm a-gettin' weak ag'in. Give me a tetch ov that whisky. 'Pears ez though suthin' hez bu'st loose inside."

There was a sudden change in the man, as startling as it was unexpected.

"Speak up, then," said Sam, as he moistened the whitening lips.

"It's now or never."

"Never goes; an' yit—I think I've see'd you afore. Ef you want to find her monstr'us bad—look fur—Captain Bloom."

"As nervy a rascal as I ever saw," remarked Sacramento Sam, as he turned away a little later.

"He was dying by inches, and he knew it; but he never gave a shiver. He might have put us on the trail; but I guess he has done enough as it is. From what you have told me in regard to the Appleby matter, I think I understand the letter, and know something of the game. But where does Chet D'Aubigné come in at; and how do you have an interest in the scheme?"

"Thunder! I have no interest. It seems to be the scheme which has an interest in me. I am just as straight, square and solid a sport as ever struck the town of Sunrise. You ought to be able to tell that from the strength of my hand to-night against such experts as you all were. It is evident the woman has taken me for some one else; and Chet thinks as she winks. It was all a chance, my striking the Applebys, and yet my meeting them served to convince them the more. If I had had any small change when they passed around the bat the racket might never have happened, though it was certain she had an eye on me, and the gang was at her back. It was the quickness with which she got in her work rattled me. After I got my breath once I rather enjoyed it till she got to shooting too close."

"As long as it is the other fellow who gets hit you needn't worry. From what she said I suspect the Applebys are in no danger from her, and she has gone to doctor them. If we only knew what the game is in regard to them we could tell better how to shape the campaign."

"There must be money in it, somewhere."

"Heaps of money! D'Aubigné probably knows all about it, but however hard we pinched him he is not the kind to squeal. And then, I don't see exactly clear to get the double-cinch on."

"Hello!"

"What?"

"Nothing, just now. The expression gave me an idea. I never was anything of a thief-taker, but the gang has all taken a hock at me, and I think I can give you a pointer. There is a fellow who acts as a go-between, if I am not wide off. If he would tell all he knows he might tell a great deal. His name is Benham, and he led the crowd after me."

"I have him down fine, but he knows nothing beyond the town, and that is not what I am after just now."

"And the gang was possessed with an idea that the old fellow who dealt faro at Nip's last night, and who is the 'old genius' of the letter, beyond a doubt, was Dan Garland, the detective."

"Perhaps they were not so far wrong," replied Sacramento Sam, dryly, and as he spoke there was a gentle tap at the door.

In answer to the request to come in, Big Bert stepped across the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BIG BERT MAKES A POINT.

"GLAD ter see that ye'r livin', pard, an' doin' well. I war afraid it war ther other way, but I didn't take time ter see. If you warn't, stoppin' would do no good. If you war, I thort it would please yer best if I went on, an' brung yer back some news."

"Can't say I catch on to what you are driv-ing at, but I guess it is all right. Come in and speak it a little plainer. News is what I want, now."

Bert had halted at the door, and was looking curiously around. First, his gaze sought Sacramento Sam. Then, it wandered to the motionless figure on the bed. Dead men were not a rarity in Sunshine; and the disposition of them was not at all times as orthodox as the fashions further East would have demanded.

"Guess I understand it now, 'thout askin' much questions," he replied coming forward.

"I heared something about a shootin' scrape at the Light, an' follered up. By ther time I got hyer I didn't know what ter think. I saw a woman come out in a hurry, an' a bit later, Pard Sam came to ther door. Then, a galoot jumped in an' hit him fur keeps."

"Correct, as far as it goes. Now, who was the galoot?"

"I didn't know just then, but I swore I'd find out, an' I dropped right in on his trail."

"Before I got very fur I knewed he war fol-lerin' ther woman; an' so I had a chance ter trail 'em both, an' hear a leetle ov the conver-sation when ther two gat tergether. I hed a notion ter bring ther feller right hyer when they go through, but she saved me ther trouble. Ho wern't quite in condish' ter 'move so fur, an' I don't think you would wantter hit him back ef you could see him. I bin havin' a bit ov a job at nussin' myself."

"The infernal murderer! Who was the vic-tim this time?"

"Tom Benham; an' ef you could 'a' heared ther way they talked to each other it would 'a' made yer open yer eyes. It did me! Guess he didn't get any more than he deserved, ef ther truth's told, but it war hot, an' heavy."

"And then, what became of her?"

"Off on bossback. It war Spifire that stove Tom's face all up. Whar she war goin' I couldn't say jest fur certain, but I think, mabe, I could make a guess. If Tom knew he'd tell fast enough, but he's only got an idear."

"An idea will be good enough to start on, especially if you are anyways good at guessing. You don't remember what their conversation was like?"

Without much being left out Big Bert went over the conversation as he heard it."

"Thanks, old man. You have at least told me for sure who the parties are; the next thing is to bag the game. I am afraid Bentam and Chet D'Aubigné have done nothing for which we can hold them; but if I can get hands on the doctor I have her sure; and anyhow, there is not much danger of those bonds going into the pockets of the precious set. If you can tell me anything more about the lot, out with it. If not it is time to be moving. Can I depend on you?"

"Every time, pard. A man with ther grip you hev can't help but be squar', an' that's all I'm askin' ov yer. In course, I ain't leavin' biz ter rustle 'round at large; but when I kin do yer a good turn you kin count me thar."

"That's enough for the present. I know which side to put you on, and can rely on your silence. For the first, show me this Tom Benham, if he can be reached without going through all the Saints of Sunrise. I would like to have a little private conversation with him."

"I got that all fixed. He hez some broken bones, an' a pard ov mine aro watchin' him while I looked fur old Morehead. I found him, too, an' sent him in, but you can count that ain't no more got ther office."

"Good enough. Do you want to follow the thing up, Jaimeson, or have you had enough of the saints?"

"If it is to look after the interests of Appleby and the Kitten, you can count me in. I feel as though I ought not to leave their trail until they are safely out of the mix. If it wasn't for that I would beg to be excused. I am not exactly the sort of man to interfere in matters of the law. I try to live square, but it's gliding pretty close to the legal limits sometimes. Lead on, though! I'm with you to-night."

Big Bert was a man who could be relied on, and they followed him without hesitation, though Jaimeson did suggest to his companion something about a trap. When they came to the cabin where Barton had left him they found him there, but in a bad way.

There were more broken bones, even, than they had been led to expect, and though it was possible that he would recover, he was not taking his injuries at all like the dead outlaw. His courage was of a different kind, and when he came to face pain for an indefinite period it oozed away.

The visitors filed in, and he stared at them with bloodshot eyes and quivering lips, for a

moment intermitting the curses they heard as they came.

"Bad sort of work this, and yet, perhaps, it was a lucky accident after all. No use to put the handcuffs on for the present. It don't look as though you would be missing if we want you."

"Curses on it all! Who are you?" yelled Benham, ending with a groan that was almost a screech.

"It makes no difference who I am. It is enough to know I was having an eye on you, and if that foolishness at the bank had really come off to-night, you would have found yourself in as bad a pickle as you are now. You are a minor sort of a villain, anyhow, only working as the strings were pulled, and not even knowing who you were working for. A trip to the jug for ten years or so will probably cover all we can put against you now. But I wouldn't be surprised if it would go harder, considerably harder, with your pards and your masters."

"Curse you! I never had a master. And the pards I had are pards no longer. They left me in the soup before I had a chance to show what I would do. Blast them! I'll teach them a lesson yet. And you don't want to come ruffling around me, because I am on my back. I am all broke up, but there's one hand left yet that can pull trigger. I've never done anything yet I was afraid to father, and if I shoot you there's no one but what will give me right. Oh, if I could only move I'd rustle you out of here in no time. Git, or I'll fire!"

The one hand did hold a revolver, and as he spoke he turned the muzzle toward Sacramento Sam.

"Let up on that, you fool, you, or you will only make the thing sure. If you happen to know enough you may be able to square yourself, and have a little good nursing besides. And you will need that last if you ever want to get out of this alive. Whether you will get it from Doctor Mabel, you can tell better than I. I say not, at a venture."

"You want me to peach, do you? Blame you, you haven't got money enough to buy me! Get out of this and let me alone, or, I tell you, there will be some killing done."

"It is yourself that you will kill, then. I only gave you the chance because of your hard run of luck. There is Turner, who will squeal when he is pinched, and do just as well."

"Turner! What does he know? I reckon he's sold us out as far as he knows, already. I never did trust him. If he was white he would be here with me now. When I get out again, I'll settle with him in red and black."

"He knows enough to make himself safe, at all events, and when we send you and the doctor over, he will go out a free man."

"And how about Chet D'Aubegne? Ain't he in the mire as far as the rest of us?"

"That is for you to say. Turner is a little weak on that point."

"Weak, is he? Oh, they are all weak when it comes to leaving Tom Benham in the drag. They thought they were fooling him to the top of their bent, too. Oh, I can say a thing or two; and if it wasn't for this infernal pain, that won't let me think, I don't know but what I'd do it, just to show 'em. And she thought I didn't know where she was going!"

"The pain won't be any easier for one while. If you are going to talk, you had better be doing it. Then, perhaps, Morehead's medicines can reach the right place. You can swear they won't while you have the doctor on your mind, and the handcuffs on what's left of your wrists. I'm not taking any risks, mind you. As soon as I am sure you will not do me any good, I'll take you in, if it's only corpse-shape you're fit to travel. And you can bet it won't be any easier for you to go jolting over the roads leading out of Sunrise. It's a full round-up I am after, and I mean to make it."

With a dexterous twitch he managed to relieve the wounded man of his revolver, and then stood carelessly awaiting his answer.

"I believe you. We have been barking up the wrong tree. Somehow these broken bones are taking all the nerve out of me, or I'd wait till I met them to get square. As it is, I'll talk, if it's only for the satisfaction of knowing that more than I will be in the dump."

Interspersed with his words all along there were certain groans and curses, which it is as well to leave to be imagined. The reality will hardly be reached. Sam laughed softly as he heard the offer—for such it was.

"Talk ahead, old man, and if it amounts to anything, I'll stand by you. You understand, it is time I am after. In the long run I would have the lot, anyway. Proofs are plenty, but I want to catch them before they do more damage."

"Perhaps I can't do as much for you there as I would like to, but I can give you a hint."

"First of all, can you tell me what there is in this matter of the Applebys, and why was it your gang wanted to kill this stranger? And where does Uncle Ezra come into the game? If I hear a straight string on those points I will know how much to believe in regard to the rest. You can hardly tell anything about them which will damage you."

True enough, there was nothing, so far, in re-

gard to the persons mentioned, which could harm him if told. Of course, a couple of attempts on the life of Uncle Ezra, and the lynching party he had tried to organize for the benefit of Jean Jaimeson, were not of enough importance in his mind to amount to much.

In a low tone, and a little brokenly, he ran over the points in regard to the doctor. How, in course of events she had learned that Dan Garland the detective and a man who was once her husband were both on their way to Sunrise, and that Adam Appleby was her uncle, and by will the heir to a fortune left him by her father.

If Jaimeson was not her first husband she had certainly been badly mistaken. She seemed to have no doubts in regard to the matter, had described what he would look like and afterward pointed him out to Benham. After that there was no doubt in his mind, or in that of Chet D'Aubegne, which was the secret cause of the trouble that evening at the gaming-table.

He knew nothing positively as to the abduction of Adam Appleby and his granddaughter, but he was pretty sure the madame had a hand in it.

From all he had heard, he thought the doctor intended to make away with them, as well as with the man she supposed to be her former husband; or drop him, Benham, at Sunrise, to bear the weight of the bond business; and, taking Chet along, vanish for good. Appleby was not, in all probability, the old man's name; and if she once got her hands on a million, it was not likely she would care how soon her late comrades in crime got themselves into trouble. Oh, she was a desperate criminal, and all the luck would go to her hand! There was one point, though, in which she had failed, and it might make her trouble. Appleby had posted a letter that day, and she had offered him a thousand dollars to get it for her. If that went through it might face her somewhere to her ruin.

"Well, I swear!" exclaimed Jaimeson, as the man paused to recover his breath.

"I said if she had worn spectacles, she would not have been making such mistakes, and I am betting now I made a center shot. She is a handsome woman, but she is older than she once was—and so is that husband of hers. If she had taken me for her grandchild it would have been about as ridiculous."

"Perhaps," answered Sam, thoughtfully, "but you don't understand you look as though you might be older than your looks. If she is a trifle near-sighted, and your face answers to one she remembers, there may be some excuse for her, considering the news she had received. But that is not telling where she is now. With two murders in Sunrise, and a robbery in Hard Luck, much after the style of the one she was going to pull off here, she is an important personage. If Benham really wants to get in his work, he had better put on his thinking cap."

"I've said it all because she tried to play me dirt. Curse her! she is off and away, and laid me groaning here. Freeze onto Chet, and he may bring you to her. If he don't, you can find her with Captain Bloom."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Sam.

"Put two and two together and it makes an idea. You may have done better than you knew."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TRE SLUMBERS OF THE KITTEN ARE GUARDED.

THE intercepted letter gave the latest items up to date in regard to Adam Appleby and the Kitten. It also gave some information in regard to Ezra, which was correct in every particular.

When Ezra returned to consciousness, which was not long delayed in spite of the weight Nulty put into the blow, he was as wide awake as ever, and he did not appear to be concerned in regard to the company in which he found himself. He rose to a sitting posture, and finding he had been dragged nearer to the objects of his interest, he stared reflectively at the Applebys, without uttering a word.

"And who in blazes are you?" asked the leader, turning on him a scowling face.

"Pears like ez you war mighty anxious ter git yer head cracked, crawlin' up on a camp like that. Pity bo hadn't put more steam ter ther blow, it would 'a' saved trouble later on. What are we goin' ter do with you?"

"Don't bother me a bit. It's your say-so, an' you kin fix it ther best way yer knows how. If you hed left me shootin'-irons whar they b'longed, I might 'a' seen a way ter help yer outen the trouble; but as it are—answer yer own conundrums."

In a careless sort of way he spoke, and then resumed the contemplation of the Applebys, who were looking on, the one with interest and the other with terror.

The man was perplexed when he heard this proposition. A life more or less on his hands did not trouble him much in a general way, but he could not believe there was no connection between the three. While he hesitated, feeling suggestively of his revolver, the Kitten put in a word that perhaps helped Uncle Ezra out of present danger.

"If you want me you had better take him along, too. The one of us won't do you much good without the other. If you kill him here I think I shall die, right now. And then, where will you be?"

"Livin' ov course," answered the outlaw, who heard the feeble suggestion which had been made by inspiration alone.

"But ef you wants him I guess you can have him, ef he kin keep up with ther crowd. We got all ther kerryin' in view we kin afford, an' ef he falls back thar's only one thing we kin do. Rise up, Mister Man, an' step out. Ther fu'st crooked move er hang back an' thar's a end ov you."

"Ez good an answer ez any," said the late tramp, rising to his feet without any of the expected difficulty.

"An' ez thar's four ov yer, with weepins drawed, an' we're a pair ov broke down, ole men, guess you won't have sry 'bjection ter me a-walkin' 'longside ov pard, byer, an' helpin' him over ther stony places. He needs some'un ter guide his wanderin' footsteps."

"Catch hold, ef yer wants to," was the surly answer.

"Then we'll hev yer both tergether, an' won't need half ther watchin'. But step keerful!"

With a strength and a kindness hardly to be expected from a man who, in spite of his bettered appearance was still the same rough and tough individual whom Jaimeson had found taking a snooze in the old shed, Ezra supported old Adam as they once more set out on their line of march.

"Mebbe you'll b'lieve w'ot I war telling yer now?" he queried, speaking in a low tone, though without any effort to hide his words from the others.

"You kin see fur yerself that all this hyer fuss ain't made fur to git a chance ter jump ther Red Dog. When I spoke to yer thef I war jest a-thinkin', but now I'm dead sure. Thort I'd seen them eyes afore; an' thar war suthin' familiyer 'bout yer own linneaments. I war on the Kearns Rivyer once, an' see'd a man ez looked ez though, in course ov time he mought run down inter some sich specimint ez you; an he hed a kitten in tow ez mought hev growed up inter ther imidge ov her. I knowed w'ot his name war then, an' I've never furgot it. Don't you go fur to worry 'bout this thing. I got suthin' ter say 'bout it, an' I'll stan' by yer. An' don't try ter throw off on yer Unkel Ezry. He's yer last hope."

Adam looked at him, listened, and shivered; but no answer did he make. He only leaned a little heavier on the pudgy arm linked within his own and plodded on more downcast than ever.

Ezra was not tired of talking, but the silence was discouraging. He could not guess whether he had done good or evil by his words, and for a long time kept silent. He strewdly guessed that their destination could not be much further off, or else they would soon have a chance to continue their journey on horseback.

He found the former to be the case—comparatively speaking. He was red in the face, moist, or more than moist, on the cheeks and brow, and panting loudly when they had scaled the last ascent reaching to their stopping place, and entered the crevice in the rocks which served as a portal to the biding-places of his captors.

As there was no effort at concealment of the way, he looked around with some curiosity. That there was no effort at concealment, was ominous. Certainly, in their right senses they would not care to give away the secrets of the spot. Either they did not expect to use it again, or the prisoners were to have no opportunity to avail themselves again of the knowledge they were gaining.

Although the place that received them was not inviting in its looks, or remarkable for its comforts, the three were glad enough to have a chance to rest. Ezra was tired, Adam was exhausted, and the Kitten, who had been carried for a great part of the way, was quietly carrying on her game.

Fortunately, for a time they were left to themselves, though therero was a guard in sight, who handled his gun in a way that told what he would do at first sign of any attempt at escape.

When a man came in with a rude but sufficient dinner, the two men were silently watching Kitty, who lay quiet save for a gasping motion as she caught her breath. She was a born actress, for she deceived even Uncle Ezra, who was suspicious from the start.

"Eat, drink, an' be merry," said their waiter, as he deposited the pot of soup on the ground, and placed a water jug by the side of it.

"Loctenant'll be in to see yer soon, an' you'll be apt to know what's what."

In due time the lieutenant appeared. As he was masked, it was hard to say whether he was any better-looking than the others, but his voice was a trifle softer, and his speech considerably nearer to the correct. His business appeared to be principally with Uncle Ezra.

"What the infernal idiots meant by bringing you here, when it was just as easy to knock you in the head, or leave you where they found you, is more than saints and angels could ever declare. I have half an idea to murder them, and

put you in their place. Looks as though I wouldn't lose a fortune by the exchange."

"Looks ez though you jest wouldn't, an' looks don't lie. Hyer er otherwise I kerry ther whole end wbar I'm put—pervidin' I take hold. Wouldn't hurt if you'd murder 'em, aryhow, ter begin with. Mought talk over ther balance afterwards."

"Thanks. I will tell them of your suggestion, leaving out my share, of course. It won't make them any the more soft-hearted when they come to dealing with you after the fashion I suppose they will. The boys seemed to think you were part of the outfit; but I can see they were 'way off."

"Don't be too sure ov that. I got inter ther game a shade late, but methinks I hev come ter stay. You kin git ther truth outen me, w'ich are a blame sight more ner you kin say about them two. An' w'en yer gits ther truth—er ther boss ye'r' workin' fur does—it'll make a heap ov change in ther way thangs are ter be done."

"Pity ther boss is not here to take it all in; but in his absence I don't know that we have any particular need of the truth."

"Better wait tell she comes, then; fur, I tell yer, if yer don't ye'll wish yer hed. An' I'd jest ez soon see ther boss hyer ez elsewhere. It's w'ot I'm hyer fur, an' I reckon I'll stay."

"Sorry to disappoint you; but unless you can make a clearer case you won't be apt to accomplish it. As far as I can see there is nothing left for us to do but to plant you all and change our base."

"It may look like that, young man, it may look like that, but I wouldn't do it. Ther boss are a unreasonable pusson, quick with weepins, an' not pertick'ler whar he strikes when things don't go ter suit. An' w'en he found ther truth ov this it wouldn't suit, notter bit ov it. Ef yer don't b'lieve me, give her ther latest."

"That's twice you've said that word. Now, dry up on it, or chew lead."

"All right! I understands ther game, ez you kin tell. It's straight goods I'm givin' yer, all wool an' a yard wide. Try it an' see."

Ezra spoke with an earnestness of which there could be no question, even if the truth was a different matter. The lieutenant was willing to listen."

"Jest send word that ther kid are nigh about dyin', an' that ther old man are no more her gran'pop than I be, ner not nigh ez mucn. He picked her up some years ago on the Kearns River, an' hez bin tetin' her 'round so long he's kinder got ter b'lieve it, but her reg'lar name war Hurd. An' ef she wants ter know of the man ez sez these things kin tell ther truth you kin say yer saw a star on his wrist, an' a scar on his throat."

He pushed up his sleeve and pointed with the forefinger of the other hand to a small star tattooed there with India ink, and then pulled down the neckband of his shirt to reveal the scar.

"That's all you need ter say. One way er another it'll bring ther boss fast ez hoss-flesh kin kerry. An' I'll be ready fur ther meetin'."

It was the information delivered in this manner that caused the letter to be written which brought about so much trouble in Sunshine. Perhaps it saved Uncle Ezra some trouble, for from that time on he was let severely alone by the lieutenant, who went away without questioning his other prisoners.

Though they knew the guard was at all times where he could command the only avenue of escape, yet he was not at all times visible, and in his absence the Kitten permitted her eyes to brighten, while her low-spoken words showed she was as much herself as ever.

Uncle Ezra was evidently a study. Clad in Johnny's broadcloth he might well be a puzzle to an older head than hers.

"You seem to know a heap, Mister Man," she found the opportunity to say.

"I wish you would tell me some more. At present we are not in precisely the condition to suitably reward you, but when we get down to pay-dirt I can assure you our gratitude would take the correct shape."

"For instance! Who is the boss?"

"Don't worry, leetle gal, don't worry. I'm afriad you'll find out too soon ez it are. But ef I know ther boss yer won't be hurt, an' you'll hev a livin' chance ter speak a good word fur yer grandpop. I figger it that way, anyhow."

"Then, perhaps, you would tell me who you are. You are a queer sort of a man, and I don't know whether to trust you or be afraid."

"Trust me, leetle one, trust me. I kin ter Sunrise fur suthin' else, but sence I've got switched onto this track I'll stay right by yer. Don't yer be afriad ez long ez Unkel Ezry are byer. I'll take keer ov yer ef I hev ter slaughter 'em all."

"Thanks, awful, but I can take care of myself. It's grandpa that I am worrying about. But I just told him to keep quiet and I would try and bring him through; I'm awful tired now. Do you think it would be safe to go to sleep for a while? I want to be wide awake tonight."

"Yes—yes, leetle one. Sleep ez much ez you kin. Wile Ezra are 'ere I'll swear you won't be harmed."

The child allowed herself to sink back, but for a long time she watched Ezra through half-closed lids, trying to make out who and what he was. Finally she fell asleep.

Darkness came down, and for a while the child was wide enough awake, but slumber again overtook her. Ezra was crouched on one side, his band in his bosom, while Adam Appleby was at the other, sleeping and silent. They were resting so when Doctor Mabel came like a whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SPRING OF A TIGRESS.

"WHERE is she? By the flends! If you have harmed her I'll make you all sup sorrow. Be quick! Lead me to her. If ever I was thankful for the skill I have in nursing the wounded it is now. Is she badly hurt?"

With eyes blazing, and face on fire, the doctor appeared before the lieutenant, and darted her questions at him as though the next moment she would fall on him and rend him.

"Take it easy, doctor. No one is dead yet, and I don't know that any one is going to die unless it is so elected. If you want to see her I can take you to her myself. The kid is sharp as a steel-trap, and fooled me bad, though I did not examine her as closely as I might. I would have thought it made no difference if it had not been for the snoozer in broadcloth. Maybe he was living."

"Thank Heaven! Where have you got them?"

"Only one place to put them unless we brought them out with the men. And I thought it just as well not to do that. They have seen too much as it is."

"Not together?"

"Yes. What was the difference?"

"Not much, perhaps, since the man wanted to stay, anyhow. I hope he will get his full satisfaction out of the interview he no doubt covets. Otherwise it might have been the mistake of your life unless he was double-tied and had a weight on. That thing will do no longer. Take him somewhere else, while I have a look at the others. I will see him later on, when I have made sure."

"Then, there is to be no killing? I'm glad of it. I was afraid—"

"Never mind what you were afraid of. You are keeping me waiting. Get them apart as quickly as you can. I want to see the girl alone. The old man she calls grandfather don't count."

She spoke sharply, with the air of one who was accustomed to be obeyed, and the lieutenant did not hesitate, though it was plain he would have liked to ask some questions. He left the doctor to herself while he went away to have her orders executed.

When the doctor entered the apartment which had been used as a prison cell, Uncle Ezra was no longer there, but the Kitten was sitting up looking around her in the bewildered way of one just aroused from a sleep, while Adam Appleby was quietly slumbering, in utter exhaustion after the tramp and trials of the day, to say nothing of the experiences of the night before.

Madame Mabel glanced warily around before she allowed her gaze to rest fixedly upon the child. The lantern did not illuminate the apartment with any great brilliancy, and she wanted to make sure there was no one lurking in the shadows.

"Well," said Kitty, not waiting for her visitor or to speak.

"You have come at last. I have been waiting for you. I suppose you have made up your mind since last evening."

There was more of spite than fear in her tone, but the sound of her voice made the doctor start.

"What do you know about last evening? And never mind about it, either. The first thing to do is to let me look at your hurts. When I was sent for I was told you were dying."

When she heard the Kitten talk Madame Roland knew that she was in no present danger, and the revulsion, prepared as she had been, was great.

Yet she wanted to make certain, and advanced, gathering coolness as she came.

"Oh, I dropped on my feet, as all kittens do. It shook me up a bit; but that was nothing. I thought if they wanted me they might carry me. I would not be half as tired when I got here. And somehow, after what I heard you say last night, when you thought I wasn't listening, I was pretty sure if they waited until you came there wouldn't be much harm done. You couldn't let them hurt me as long as you could see that face, don't you know?"

"What do you know about that face?"

"Nothing but what I heard you say. It's a good one, ain't it?"

The Kitten looked up saucily. If she had any understanding of the game as it had been laid out she certainly had nerve enough for a dozen.

"Child, child! Do not trifl about it. It reminds me of one I saw years ago, and that I once thought something of. Tell me truly: what is Adam Appleby, as he is called here, to you?"

"Gran'pa, of course. And if he's not, he's the best, dearest, truest old soul that ever drew breath, and I'll hold to him as long as there is

any life in his body or mine. Don't you dare to burt him, or some day I will do more than scratch."

"Quite er chip ov ther old block, ain't she?"

The question came from behind, and turning like a flash the doctor saw Uncle Ezra standing there, one hand in his pocket, and a savage leer on his face.

How he had managed to glide back she did not stop to inquire. He knew too much, and might make some answer that she did not care to hear.

"Out of this, man! Out of this! I don't want to kill you till I hear what you have to say. I pledge you my word to that, but if you stand there another minute it will be your last on earth."

"Not takin' inter account that I hev yer kivered, spite ov all yer pards' sharp searchin'. But I'm a-goin' ef so be ye'r' comin' along. I wanter hev suthin' ter say jest too bad ter miss ther chance."

He backed toward the doorway as he spoke, and she followed as he went. There was little danger of his escape, and at present his death was not what she wished to compass.

"Now then, who are you, and how does it come you know so much, if, indeed, it is not all pretense? Speak quickly. I am in no mood to trifl and you ought to be aware you are in some danger."

"Not more now than a bit ago, er furder on," responded the tramp, ignoring her question, and watching her with a keenness as great as her own."

"Drop that, mum! It's the last time of asking. I must know whether there is any truth in what you have been saying. Who are you?"

"Oscar Hurd, mum; er ther pore remnants, which are at yer service."

"Oscar Hurd? Can you imagine me that blind?"

"Not blind, mum, but a leetle near-sighted. I showed yer man ther star on me wrist, and ther scar on me throat. If yer don't b'lieve you kin look at 'em. Yer oughter know yer own work."

For a trifl his life was in danger as he stood there pushing down the neckband of his shirt to expose the mark beneath it. He knew it, too, but he never flinched.

"I cannot understand it, yet it may be true. If so, why this masquerade? There are better shapes than that, in which you could have come."

"No masquerade at all, mum, but ther clean corn. I hed blood in me eye an' teeth set fur you an' ther Saints; but when I dropped onto ole man Appleby, an' hed a chance ter study up who he war, it kinder throwed me off. An' then, the feller you war after. I couldn't quite make him out, though I guess it war jest his hard luck ez throwed him inter ther mix. He's scassly Double-Cinch Dan. That would be too good a joke."

"Entirely too good," responded the doctor, shutting her teeth hard as she thought of the strange complications.

"Who do you think he is?"

"Dunno, unless he's a younger brother. I left one er two on 'em at home when I skipped, an' sport runs in the breed."

"And you are really the thing who crawled under the shadow of Nip Allison's protection. How did you come to deceive him? Or did you buy him, right off the handle?"

"No 'ception at all. I have had more than one han'le to my name, an' Limber Luke did well enough when we were pards at Side Ace. Fur ther sake ov ole times be war willin' ter give me a chance. An' w'en I had his box in me hands he knew I couldn't be ary thing but squar'. He hed seen me tried."

"Bad thing it might have been for your younger brother; if such he is, though I doubt it greatly. I have tried to kill you, and I have tried to kill him. I didn't know that my life was made up altogether of failure, and I am not so sure it will be in the end. What is your object in all this? For an object I know you must have. Waste no time in your explanations or it will be the worse for you. I had thought you could not stand this long before me and live. I do not want to be tempted too far."

"Sence you find how things hev bin, an' w'ot I sayed yer from, yer ain't so ravenous, eh? All ther better. It would be a pity ef ther war a stain on this blessed reunion. In truth, I heared you war at Sunrise, an' ther noshun took me ter come down an' see w'ot yer looked like. An' then ther war a matter at Hard Luck, a year or more ago. I thort mebbe you could explain that to ther satisfaction ov me an' Dan Garland. An' wile I war waitin' fur him I had er chance ter git drunk, an' emprooved ther opportunity, an' other things happened; an' so, I'm hyer now."

"And this is the reality! Gracious heavens! You have fallen too low to hate. Could I but be sure you would never cross my path again I would push you out, and bid you be gone."

As she looked at the man as he was and thought of him as he had been there was a grain of pity in the loathing with which she regarded

him. If he had been wise he could have had his chance then and there.

"Jest w'ot you made ov me, mum. After our unfortunate ventoore I went gradually, but surely to the dogs. When I war Limber Luke I war a sport to sw'ar by, but it war a step down hill. An' I bin a-steppin' ever sence. When I got ter be Unkel Ezry, thar warn't much furder to go. I heared you war 'live an' prosperin', an' I thort it war time ter make my teeth meet fur ther las' time, an' then go over ther range. Ef it wa'n't fur ther Kitten in thar I could slide off happy. Ez it are, thar's somehow a sorter doubt. I ain't sure w'ot we orter be doin' though it 'pears ter me we better go."

She stared at him to see if he was in earnest. She could understand the desire to kill. She had wronged him in the past beyond pardon, and then tried to slay him. But the desire to be killed! That was beyond her. Life was too sweet, even with such passions and pursuits as hers.

"You spy, we. Are you mad enough to want to cast away your own life?"

"Ez I say, we better go; but it's the how ov it that's bin puzzlin' me. Ef we two war found corpuses hyer, some day, ther Kitten might find out ther truth; and it would make her sick. Heden't we better, we two, go ter some sequestered vale, an' jest breathe our life out tergether! She don't need us hyer."

"Not you, perhaps; but there could never be a time when I could not find my way back to the heart you have stolen from me. But for that, life might have been so different."

"You thinks so now; but ef she had stayed she would bin like you, er wuss. Git down on yer knees an' thank me thet she found her onkel. Her true gran'pop hated him bad enough, but nothin' ter w'ot he felt fur you."

"Your fault, again. You will have it!" She sprung at him like a tiger.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SACRAMENTO SAM TAKES LEAVE OF SUNRISE.

"SORRY I can't stay with yer longer," said Sacramento Sam to the landlord of the Little Lamb.

"Sunrise is a fine little town, but somehow it don't suit my style. I will have to move a trifle further on."

The stage was ready to start, and Sacramento Sam seemed to be ready to go with it. His belongings were few, and there were not many friends to whom he had to say good-by. If he had done any work in Sunrise to speak of, the few loungers did not know much about it. His going, as his coming, created no great sensation. A few had been a little way behind the scenes, but they gave no sign.

Then, at the last moment, just as the stage was going to start, Chet D'Aubegne, his hand in a sling, came gliding along, and took a seat in the vehicle, with a careless nod to the other occupant. Whatever quarrel he might have had with Jaimeson this man was nothing to him save a casual acquaintance. He had picked up thousands such in his day; and forgotten the most of them.

"Morehead is an old stick," he said, as the stage rolled away.

"Doctor Mabel seems to have left the town, and I want to have some one who knows something look at my hand. It appears to me there will be some picking to do before all the pieces of bone are out."

"Not a bad scheme. It don't do to monkey with such things. A little care at the right time will sometimes save a hand. I didn't suppose it was as bad as that, though."

"When a derringer sends its little message it comes butt-end foremost, and hot enough to be heavy. The wonder is there is any hand left to think about. In my business it's a bad thing to be crippled that way, and I am bound to make the best of a bad bargain. Served me right, I suppose, for not downing Nip when he first chipped in; but he had good intentions, if they did pan out bad for me. Hope the little racket didn't break your nerve."

Chet did not mean to be unpleasant, and Sam so understood. He laughed good-naturedly.

"Not a bit of it; but with you out of the game I don't know that the sports of Sunshine are worth tackling. I'll go further till you get rested up. Maybe I can come back on you by and by. You understand. I don't care for faro; and am a little particular about who I sit down with at draw."

"That makes the boodle go further. If a fellow could keep from blowing in at the tiger what he wins at short cards he might make a stake. But somehow, though we hit it now and then, faro keeps the best of us poor."

And Chet heaved a sympathetic sigh. He could appreciate the losses which had led a sport to make such a resolution."

The stage bowled merrily along. There were but the two passengers, and they appeared to have nothing on their minds save to pass away the time. And with a hand like his it was not strange D'Aubegne would welcome a conversation with 'most any one. From anything on the

surface no outsider would have been able to say how keenly each was watching every move of the other.

"You are not altogether a stranger—by reputation at least. I recognized you by the charm you carry. We heard of you over at Bended Bow, and how you scooped the sports there. We have been waiting for you to come our way for some weeks. Pity we couldn't take better advantage of it when you arrived."

"Yes, I gave the boys at the Bow a racket, but I didn't suppose the glory of it had extended to the ends of the earth. Maybe it's the luck in the charm that is taking me out of Sunrise just at the right time. It don't always bring me my money, you see; but with that swinging in its place, I always come out right in the end."

"You wouldn't like to part with it, I suppose?"

Chet was as superstitious, without knowing it, as the average gambler usually is. It was a fact that he had heard of the doings of the sport with a charm at Bended Bow. And so had others in the town. It was that circumstance saved him from suspicion, though the stock in hand had been pretty nearly lavished before he came on the carpet.

Sam shrugged his shoulders.

"When I go out of trade, perhaps. Till that time I guess it will swing where it is. The nearest I ever came to parting with it was once when I put it in the pot for a thousand, and a misdeal was all that saved it. The next deal brought the cards my way, and since that I have never run such risks again."

"I won't urge you, then. Anyhow, I am not sure but what it is bad medicine for me. Such things do work that way, sometimes, according to the man who holds them. And I would hate to give a thousand till I knew."

They were laughing over it yet when they heard without the sharp hail:

"Down brakes, and hands up! Captain Bloom wants his toll."

The stage came to a halt so suddenly that the passengers were half-bounced from their seats.

"Brakes are down, an' hands are up! You needn't look this way, Mister Man."

The Jehu up in front was an expert in all the branches of his profession, and this was not the first time he had been halted. He kicked down the brake bar even before the order was completed, and taking a strong pull on his team, got his hands up well in sight. As they were filled with the bundles of lines, there was no danger of his doing any damage to the assailants.

"That's right, Tommy. Every one knows you to be a man of sense. Now, how about the men inside? Will they come down, like Captain Scott's 'coon, or will we have to bring them? You tell, and if it don't suit them, they can speak for themselves."

"Don't know that it is worth having one's light put out for all the wealth I have on me," said Chet, putting his head out of the window.

"Besides, I am a cripple, anyhow. It will be mighty unhandy, getting my hand in my pocket. One of you fellows will have to do it for me."

"Ha, ha! Good for Chet D'Aubegne. Step out, old fellow! Wolf shouldn't eat wolf, and we'll let you slip clear if your pocketbook don't turn out to be too tempting. Who else have we got in there?"

"It's another man of the same stripe—Sacramento Sam, the Sport with a Charm. I doubt if his purse is any fatter than mine."

"That is something else. We have heard of him, too, but he don't belong in these diggings, and reckon he will have to pay his toll to make him free of the range. And we want those mail-bags. If you can't haul more coin, Tommy, we'll have to try to make it up with the paper."

D'Aubegne had stepped nimbly out and down. His one hand was still in the sling, but the other was well elevated. He knew the formula in such cases made and provided; and he had another good and sufficient reason, though he kept it carefully to himself. Except when he was utterly off his guard through anger—and that did not often occur—there was not much to be told from his face.

Yet, without knowing it, Chet was playing into the hands of Sacramento Sam. The latter had kept his head from the first, and all the better because he was not taken by surprise. Some such move as this was what he had been expecting. As Chet reached the ground from the one side of the coach, he leaped out on the other, and just when the obsequious driver was dragging the mail-pouch from the front boot he was raising his own hands. And both of them were well filled.

"Hands up, you, Captain Bloom! Only time of asking. I have you lined, and my pards will look after the rest."

The answer was a rattling discharge of firearms.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DOUBLE CINCH.

UNTIL he was under the stage Sacramento Sam had not the opportunity to see who was pitted against him. Then, he noted there were at least four mounted men in a bunch, with

their arms trained on the coach, while a triflē in advance of them was the individual he took for Captain Bloom. As yet he was by no means certain what D'Aubegne would do, but he did not count at best on much assistance from him.

The odds were long for one man to face, but it was just what he had to do, or give up the game. Of course he never dreamed of doing that.

The volley which followed his challenge was not more than he had expected, and he heard the balls go tearing through the coach with a self-congratulation that he was no longer inside, though there was little time for anything but business.

Captain Bloom was the nearest and the best mark. He could have dropped him without difficulty, but there was something more than the desire to capture him living to hold his hand. Instead, he turned the muzzle of the heavy revolver in his right hand, and then let go at the horse.

A better movement could not have been made. The animal was hard hit, yet not ready to fall. It wheeled sharply, and dashed at the little knot of horsemen but lately in its rear.

Then, Sacramento Sam's revolvers began to bark, and his bullets to bite deeply. He knew he had a moment or two in which he might hold them at a disadvantage, and he lost no time. As coolly as though he was shooting at a mark he aimed first at one, then at another, both bullets going home.

Again there was an answering volley, and this time he had been located, and the bullets came nearer. The volley was followed by a rush.

The odds were still against him, but Sam showed no signs of fright, and would have held his own even if help had not been at hand. With a cheer half a dozen horsemen came down the road at breakneck speed.

In their desire to avoid being seen they had dropped a little further behind than was altogether prudent, but the stout defense of Sacramento Sam atoned for that.

When the party appeared on the scene the attack changed into a rout. There was some reckless use of fire arms, but in another minute the outlaws, or those of them who were able to go, were off and away. One of the wounded men had dropped to a shot of Sam's and as Jean Jaimeson came up at the head of the supporting force he took a snap-shot at Captain Bloom, who dropped with a pistol in—her hand. Captain Bloom was the doctor.

It was no more than Sacramento Sam had suspected, and Jean Jaimeson knew her the moment his eyes fell on her face, as she reclined in the road, supported by Chet D'Aubegne.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jaimeson.

"I have killed the woman!"

"Hard luck," answered Sam, quietly taking advantage of the victory, by securing his wounded man, whom he knew to be little more than disabled.

"At the same time, I don't know but what it is the best for her. Better than to go out, woman though she was, at the end of a rope. And if she missed that, it was prison for life, sure."

"Curses on you all!" interrupted a voice. "You have taken us both out of the damp together. For that much you have the thanks of Chet D'Aubegne."

A chance shot had found its billet with the gambler, and he was going off the trail forever.

The wounded man was Sacramento Sam's bonanza. He had not the nerve of his comrade who died at Sunrise, and gave up the secret of Bloom's retreat without much pinching. From his description, Big Bert had no trouble in guiding the party there, and the two men on guard offered no resistance worthy of the name. They found Adam not much the worse for wear, and the Kitten as lively as ever.

Fortunately for her peace of mind, the child had not understood the game of which she had been almost the center, and knew nothing of the struggle in the outer cave, or the tragedy around the coach from Sunrise. She accepted the presence of Jean Jaimeson as a natural corollary, and went back to Sunrise rejoicing, little dreaming of the scent of blood on the letter of Adam which went through.

After that there was a picking up of some minor rascals, as accessories in the robbery of the coach, and the work of Sacramento Sam was done, so far as the neighborhood of Sunrise was concerned.

"And so you were Double-Cinch Dan, after all," remarked Jaimeson. "On my soul, I once thought I might be selected by the Saints of Sunrise to fill that bill. When you want to quit thief-taking you can settle down as a sport, and get away with the best of us."

"Don't be too sure about anything. Dan Garland likes to keep his ways and means to himself, though he tries to have them perfect in their kind. But if I had not been sure she would come for the coach to get that letter of Adam's we might have had a weary old chase before we got the doctor or the Kitten."

"And, by the way, what has become of Uncle

Ezra? I imagine he was one of the means you allude to."

"Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies. I am afraid he will not appear again on this trail, at any rate. And I doubt if you will see him on any other."

It goes without saying that pay-dirt was never reached in the Red Dog, but that Adam Appleby, under a somewhat different name, entered into the possession of his legacy. When it comes to the Kitten it will be by testament and not by inheritance. As yet neither of them suspect the near relationship existing between them, though she will call the old man grandpa to the end of the chapter. Recognizing his weakness in certain directions Adam has already settled a large portion of the fortune on the child; but so far his cough has not troubled him much, and he has been able to control his appetite for liquor. Since his return to the East he has not been inside of a gambling house. Jean Jaimeson visits them frequently, having changed from a sport to a stock dealer and settled in the same city. Surely, he was no kin to Uncle Ezra!

The last time he was there the Kitten remarked:

"I may have been proud in those old days, but I tell you, we didn't starve."

"And I don't think we will now," was the dry answer.

After all, there was only about ten years difference in their ages.

As to the other Saints of Sunrise, there is little need to follow them further. There were, however, saints, and other saints. There were bad men at large, who were not identified particularly with the gang controlled through her lieutenants by Doctor Mabel. For the former there was no particular need to fear Dan Garland's Double Cinch. Of the others, those who were worth taking in received their just deserts, or were driven from the town, while the unregistered bonds of the bank went out in safety.

Nip Allison continued to run the Living Light. It is true, the saloon had been headquarters for a great deal of wickedness, but no one could prove that he had more than his open share in it, and for the time being he slipped clear.

As for Dan Garland, he went away sighing for more worlds to conquer—and, found them.

THE END.

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